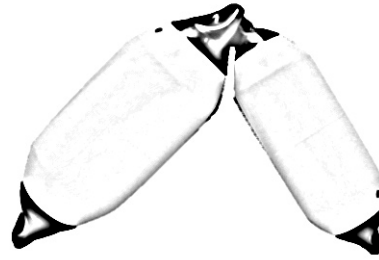


DOCKING STRATEGIES

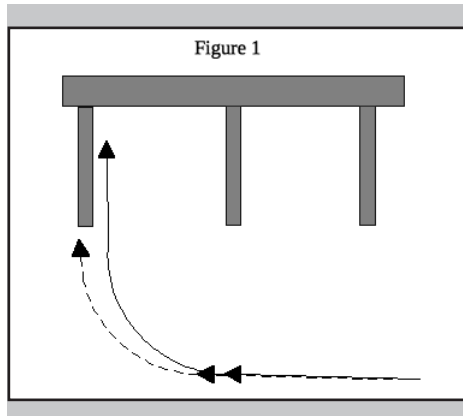
IDEAS TO MAKE DOCKING EASIER

BY MIKE HUSTON



This article is a continuation from last month's issue (*Good Docking: An Overview**) which discussed the docking process from an overall point of view. This month's article will focus on how best to approach a dock.

This month we will concentrate on what is probably the most common docking situation in our Northwest waters – pulling into a slip on a finger pier. The temptation in this case is to try to judge the docking so that the boat pulls in parallel to the dock. But this plan requires perfect execution.



For example, over shooting just a wee bit will create an unwanted result (see the dashed line in Figure 1).

A better approach is to make this turn in two stages. Doing so allows the helmsperson an opportunity to adjust for misjudgments and provides a target for doing so. This is hard to explain in words so let's work with some more diagrams.

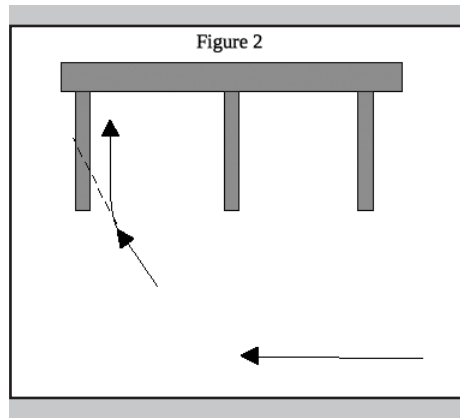
Figure 2 shows the two turn approach. On my 43-foot boat I start

**If you wish to read last month's article but do not have the issue at hand, it is available online at www.48north.com Just click on the March 2012 issue and go to page 35.*

this turn when the bow is at or slightly before the finger pier next to the one I'm aiming at (for smaller boats this starting point will likely be a bit later since they turn quicker). The target point for this first turn should be between one third to one half of the way down the finger pier (see dashed line). And, as the bow of the boat approaches the dock, the second turn is initiated. Finally, reverse power is used to slow the boat.

Now look at Figure 3 where I have drawn three different initial turns. Note that all three cross the same point where the second turn is initiated (denoted by the circle). Two things to look at here: First, notice that one of these turns was started in the middle of the previous slip and one was started early in the slip being docked at. This is a fairly wide range – the point being that the starting point of the first turn does not have to be spot on.

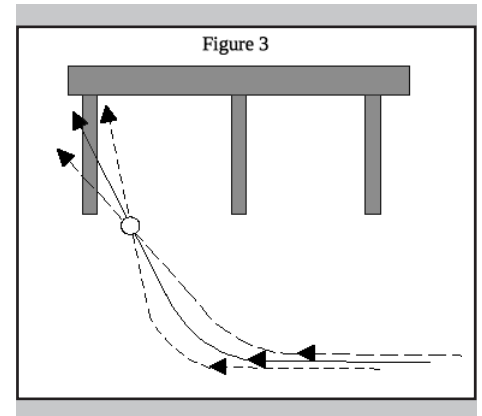
The second thing to look at is where the boat is aimed after the first turn. Note that "ideal" turn is still aimed



around the middle of the finger pier. But if you turned a bit early or the boat responds faster than you expected then aim out from the dock further (see track with long dashes). If the turn is started late aim for the inside end of the finger

pier (see track with short dashes). I will admit that this is the main place where a bit of judgement and practice is needed. But it does provide an opportunity to correct for a misjudged first turn. And the remaining second turn is smaller and closer to the dock which makes it easier to judge.

The second turn is usually started when the boat's bow is just a few feet off the dock. Note that the bow will actually swing away from the dock a bit when the turn is initiated. This being the case, it may well be necessary



to break the process into three turns, especially when the first turn has been started early and the boat is aimed at the end of the dock. Make the additional turn with the boat about a boat length from the dock. The new aiming point will likely be the corner where the finger and main dock meet (similar to the short dashed line). This will allow the bow to get further into the slip before the final turn.

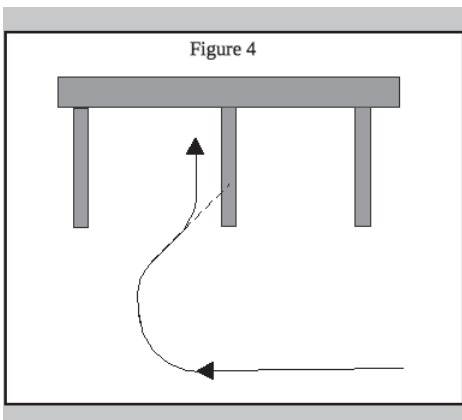
Here are a few little tips that might help with these final approaches:

Hint 1: Be very aware of your boat's prop walk as it can help or hurt. Most boats walk to port which means reversing the engine will pull the boat into the

dock when docking to the port side. Likewise, it will tend to pull the boat further from the dock when docking to starboard. Here is one of those hints – when docking to starboard start the final turn and let the boat’s stern get some momentum toward the dock before applying reverse thrust, doing so will reduce the walk significantly. Also, if the conditions permit, coming in slower will reduce the amount of reverse thrust needed and therefore the amount of walk.

Hint 2: Going too slow can lead to difficulties when docking by reducing steerage. Admittedly, serious damage is not very likely at slow speeds, which makes going very slow tempting. But you need to maintain control of the boat, therefore a reasonable amount of speed is needed. I find 1.25 to 1.75 knots is about right for calm conditions. Any slower and the boat will tend to slide sideways rather than turn and even a light wind or current will have more time to affect the boat.

Hint 3: Stop short. By this I mean do not try to get the boat all the way into the slip. Plan to stop the boat 5-6 feet short of where it will eventually be tied. If I am on a 40 foot boat pulling into a 40 foot slip I usually try to have the boat stopped with the end of the dock right beside me (assuming an aft cockpit). This leaves a cushion for misjudgment or time for the crew to react if the engine or transmission fail.



The dockings discussed earlier are the easier of the two options – they involve a turn to starboard and then a docking on the port side (or visa versa a port turn with a starboard docking).

It is more difficult to do a starboard turn and then dock on the starboard side (or the port turn with a port side tie). But even in this situation it is possible to break the turn into two parts – see Figure 4. Basically, this involves overshooting the dock a bit so you can make the final approach at an angle, just like we did with the prior dockings. The point being, allow some margin for error and an opportunity to adjust before the final turn at the dock.

If the conditions are difficult or the aisle is tight it is reasonable to go

past the slip and spin the boat around to come back at it from the other side. This makes the docking similar to the ones shown in the first three figures.

Hopefully these ideas will make docking less stressful.

Mike Huston teaches sailing for San Juan Sailing in Bellingham, WA. He has been sailing for over 40 years, racing and cruising. He and his wife own a Jeanneau 43DS, "Illumine."

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