

“Prepare to Dock!”

*...more commonly know as,
“Honey, could you please put out
the fenders and dock lines?”*

Over the years, our preparations for docking have covered a wide range. Some of them have worked well and some have been – well, sort of ugly. For instance, the time we came in with the dock lines and fenders on the starboard side for a portside tie did not work out splendidly. And I can think of three or four times we have forgotten a bow or stern line.

Lately, things have been going much smoother – hopefully (and this may be wishful thinking) increased age and practice have improved our wisdom. But more likely it is the fact that our boat is heavy enough that man-handling it from the dock only works when the docking is perfect and there is no wind, anything else

and we simply get dragged down the dock. Therefore, we have developed a routine initiated by the command ‘Prepare to dock;’ more commonly know as, ‘Honey, could you please put out the fenders and dock lines?’

Here are the basics:

On the side we will be docking we tie three fenders, one at the beamiest part of the boat and one each 6-8 feet aft and forward of the first one. We adjust their height to match the dock, usually this puts the bottom of them a few inches off the water. If we can, we tie them on the life lines just in from of stanchions, this way they won’t slide out of place as they rub the dock.

Then we tie one or two fenders on the opposite side of the boat. Since there is usually another boat next to us we put these up high, with the top of the fenders above the toe rail. All too often I see these off-side fenders placed down near the water where they will do no good. I have taken a couple pictures and used an editor to move the boats closer together. In Figure 1 you can clearly see that having these fenders down low provides little protection – any kind of wave or wake and these boats will be hitting each other. Then look at Fig. 2, with the fenders up high it is almost impossible for the boats to touch.

We also leave one fender on the deck as a ‘roving’ fender. If we have enough crew, we have one person stand just in front of the mast with this fender and instruct them to put it between the boat and any object we are about to hit.

Next we get out four dock lines but only attach three; one each on the bow, stern and mid-ship. The fourth is placed on the deck amid-ships in case we need it (most of the time our stern line is long enough to go around a



Figure 1



Figure 2

cleat and then reach the mid-ship cleat as a spring line so we do not need the fourth line).

As we tie these lines on we also hang them on the life lines so they can easily be reached from the dock (see Fig 3). This may seem like a small thing, but it has proven to be very helpful as it allows anyone standing on the dock access to the lines. This is most important for the bow line since it is normally hard to reach without someone on the boat handing it to the person on the dock.

There are some subtleties worth mentioning: you can see them if you look closely at Fig. 3: First, we string the bow line toward the aft (and the stern line forward), this makes them easier to reach from the dock. Second, there is danger in having the dock lines go overboard and thereby getting wrapped around the prop. Therefore, we are careful to leave the bitter end on the boat and we make sure the loops over the lifelines are well centered and large. For this same reason, the lines should not be hung on the lifelines until the boat is in calm waters, usually inside the breakwater since big waves

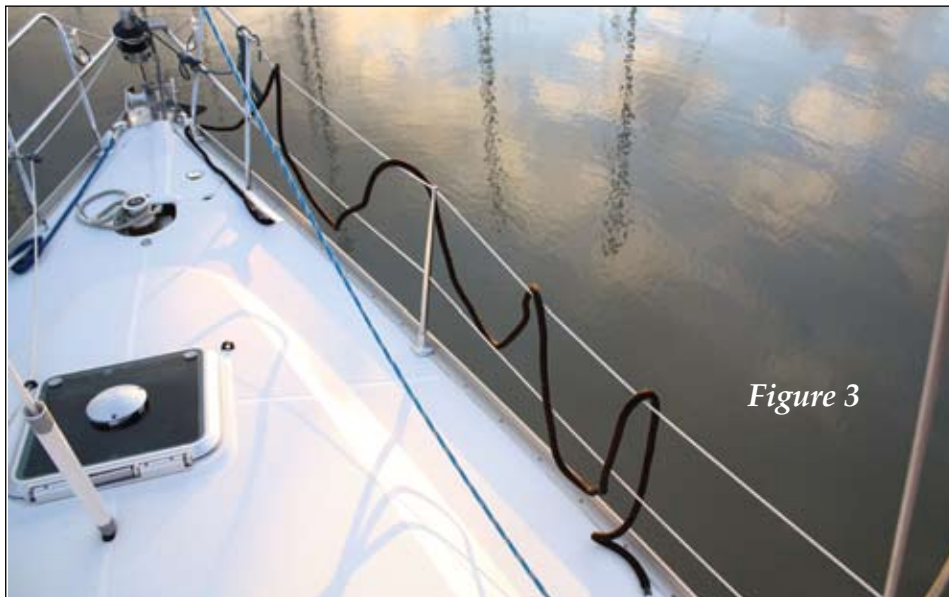


Figure 3

could bounce them off the boat. Also, be sure to string the line out over the life lines and through the chocks.

Ⓞ Last, we open the lifeline gate and, if needed, hang our fender-step.

These may seem like small details, but we have found them to be very helpful, especially when there are only two of us on the boat and the

conditions are less than perfect. Without doubt, using them has saved us from some embarrassing, not to mention expensive, mishaps.

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