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The Halmatic got a recent head best copied by the Nicholson 30



PHOTO: ANDREW TAYLOR

'She's the best boat we've ever owned – she even put paid to my wife's seasickness'

Sailing a Halmatic 30 from the River Exe



Julian and Margarett Parlett ensured they were well briefed before buying a retirement yacht. They tell Dick Durham why they're delighted with her

When you own a castle, home improvements aren't cheap so it's handy if you can make a bit of extra cash renting out your moat – one reason the Earl of Devon, who has the River Exe on his doorstep, takes an income from local yachtmen.

He also receives rent from the yacht club at Starcross, situated beneath the towers of his mansion, Powderham Castle. But nobody seems to mind. In fact, most local sailors agree it's a lot cheaper than it would be if the earl

sold it off to a commercially-minded real estate developer. One of those who certainly doesn't begrudge doing out the ducal ducats is retired solicitor Julian Parlett, 64, who, with Margarett, his wife of 40 years, owns one of the earth's Starcross sailing moorings.

I joined them both in Britain, early summer sunshine as the cawing from a noise-infested cluster of pines echoed out across the river – until I started out by popping gunfire from the Royal Marines' training camp at Lympstone on the opposite bank.

Using a precarious, bath-tub-style plastic tender, Julian gingerly slipped his outdoor and cushioned me out to Kitchell of Devon, his hardware, duck egg blue Halmatic 30, which was reacting to the flooding tide sweeping up river at two tides.

With 10 to 12 boats of north-westerly beam we set full mainmast and genoa, slipped the mooring and found we had to use the iron (upwind as well – a 25hp Beta diesel – to beat the last of the flood's downriver).

Even on such a settled day there was a lazy surf breaking across the entrance bar and we rose and fell over it as longshore rollers licked their ice cream cones and watched us from the sea walls of Exmouth.

The old Havelst boatbuilding yard of Halmatic, now long gone, once built and commissioned the Nicholson 30 for Camper & Nicholson. Designer John Sharp had worked with legends John Illingworth and Angus Pringle before setting out on his own and naming his own name with pride – not least with Condit, the Whitland round-the-world maxi-racing yacht. He then realised there was a demand for a smaller, less expensive



PHOTO: ANDREW TAYLOR

With a 25hp Beta diesel, we had no problem motor-sailing against the flood tide in the River Exe

Think the first part of sail slipping into the Swale to pick up a mooring buoy

Cruising the East Coast with a baby



Keeping it in the family: Proud Mark takes his three-month-old son to sea for the first time

As if being a novice skipper wasn't enough of a challenge, Mark Ryan decided to take his baby along for a week-long cruise

Being new is easy. Just step aboard with a skipper you trust and absorb a fair share of the responsibility. As a young boy this had been my experience of sailing with my father, Colin. Whether crawling the creeks and rivers of the East Coast, the coast of France or waters of Holland, I was an eager, able and (mostly) competent crew as you could ask for. Then it took, my father was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Besides the horror of the diagnosis, I was struck that the skills to skipper a boat had never been passed down to me, so I might struggle to carry on this family tradition.

In 2008, my father and I completed the Round the Island race to raise money for the Macmillan cancer trust in his rugged golf outfit Wankin. By then he had sold his skipper's licence, Keweenaw Yacht

Services, to focus on fighting the illness. In the post-war boom of Cowes, I fell in love with a job. Able-bodied from the very start, advertised in the window of a high street postbroker. After viewing Tricia and a quick survey, I made an offer. Fast forward to today. My wife Li and I have just had our first child, Thomas. Determined to continue sailing, Tricia, we planned our first week apart as parents to be a brief trip from the River Mersey, across the Thames Estuary and up to the River Orwell. I was suddenly struck by the responsibility of taking my new son, aged three months, into the North Sea, across treacherous sea-banks. My imagination conjured up all the things that might possibly go wrong.

Some gentle encouragement from Li finally saw me pluck up the courage to get the paraphernalia of a baby into our boat, and we set off for mid-July.

'My imagination conjured up all the things that might possibly go wrong'



Thomas was happiest relaxing in his car seat when the boat was under sail or in a moor

Our first sail down the River Swale brought it home that while Li was keen to help, I needed to learn to sail single-handed. Thomas had to be her priority. Yet with Thomas fit, she kept onto the foredeck to pull up the main and we had a cracking week downriver.

We picked up a mooring on the Swale and settled in for the evening. My father had fished out as a headboat, so a boat could serve as a pilgeron for Thomas. An anchor, on a mooring or mooring in a slight sea, he could play happily, while in a swell or when sailing he would be snug in his car seat, which we secured into one of the cushions. When Li was on the helm he'd go in a center across her chest.



Mark set off Tricia after seeing her involved in a pedestrian's shadow.

We'd also bought a pop-up travel cot with a little mosquito net for when he slept. I carried him that, as mosquitoes found their way into the forecabin. At 10pm we slipped the mooring and chugged off across a still Thomas as dawn crept up in the east. I'd hoped for a fair breeze but we motored in Suffolk Yacht Harbour on the Orwell and after dinner in the yacht club gave Thomas his bath in the washing up bowl - a little cramped but still his favourite part of the day.

Our next stop was Wisbech, half a mile upriver. It was a great base for some lovely walks through the Suffolk countryside - something that was only marred by the postboat's lack of progress through some muddy tracks. However, we quickly discovered that Thomas was fine being taken around in his baby carrier. It was a lot more convenient for us, but

We'd soon worried about other people's reactions to taking Thomas on our 'yale' go faster. But in the marina we

Tom Cunliffe is an RYA yachtmaster examiner. He has sailed tens of thousands of miles around the world.



Common causes of friction on yachts

How to reduce friction in lines and halyards

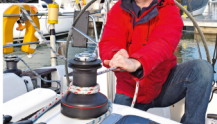
It's easy to identify why your lines are much harder work than they should be, says Tom Cunliffe



I met up with Neil Walker, who keeps his gear at Chatham, after he mentioned he was getting friction lines around his boat.

The early 20th-century sailor-writer Claude Whitts remarked that the best benediction for a seaman is, "May your ropes be small and your sheaves be large!" How right he was. We can address the third meaning of what he said later, but in principle he hit the nail on the head. It's a major cause of grief on any yacht, be it old gaffer or modern whizzer, is friction.

Within this catch-all, I include ropes not leading well, sheaves failing to spin on their pins, blocks aligned wrongly and pellets so clogged-up that they resist all human effort to turn them. There's plenty more, including Whitts's fat ropes passing through blocks and jamming too narrow to accommodate them comfortably. In fact, the whole thing can become a horror show that makes hard work of what should be plain sailing. One way and another I go to sea in all sorts of craft. When I find one where the friction drag has been state, my heart sings.



We've all struggled to haul a stinky masthead halyard—but it should never result in a pinch.

The first job on my own boat when I finally succumbed to Bermuda rig two years ago was to embark on a friction project. Wire-rod blocks were lined, hidden leads were sorted, squeaking pellets were serviced, and reefing gear was overhauled. The bit went on. It's easy to show these wretched raddles to creep up unobserved and one day you admit that the sheet winches

seem a bit more of a struggle than once they were, "is it me?" you ask yourself. Depending on your personal habits, it might be, of course, but the cause is far more likely to be a dapped-out turning block or a car whose sheave is worn flat from lack of attention. To take a balanced view, I met up with Neil Walker from Chatham on a quick check on friction issues. His Berline is

about the same age as my own boat, so I know what word be searching for. I'm always up to a sail on the Hecwyer—it makes a notable change from my local theme park down in the Solent. I know Neil and his wife Sharon to be a capable and conscientious sailing team, who maintain their yacht well and sail extensively—so any friction turned up on their boat, we'd all be wise to take notice.



A line, left, rope is easy to spot and should be put into the washing machine without delay.

Ropes

You might wonder what ropes have to do with friction. A lot, in the answer. Any rope that passes over a sheave, whether it's being turned back on itself, or just diverted a few degrees, must be bent. If it's soft and floppy, it rounds the corner easily at no cost to the person or winch delivering the power. If it's stiff, it fights all the way. Multiply this by a factor of five or six for a masthead and you have a formula for friction, especially if the rope's too big in the first place.

Neil and Sharon's ropes were very good in this respect and did credit to their maintenance schedule, but the genus furling line had slipped the net. It was so hard it stood up on its own. Images showing that round a sheave "twisty fibres" or no.

The only hope for hard ropes is to show them into the washing machine in a pillow case with a little lightweight washing compound and a good shot of fabric softener.

Big ropes, small sheaves

For some reason, everyone loves a really masthead. In times gone by a whipping sheet made sense



Our boat for the day was Neil's Bristol Channel gaff, Topaz, with its mast furling out of the top of it!

because the main was a killer of a haul on a gaffer and the more rope you had to dip your horny hands into, the better you could sail.

Today, mastheads are generally either winched or child's play, yet we still see them and even 30mm sheets on 35-footers. A 30mm rope with all those parts in the tackle is more than strong enough. Look at the blocks and check out any catches the sheet passes through. If the rope here is as light as Neil's was, the sheet won't run in light air and it'll be tougher to heave in when it's windy. Go for a smaller

sheet. Use old Hi-Fabro for dock lines and say hello to happiness.

Halyards and kickers

If goes without saying that masthead halyard boxes should be inspected at least once a year to make sure there's no damage, which can cause chafe, or tightening of the sheaves on the pins, which is often the root of really devastating friction. The same goes for sheaves around the heel of a deck-stepped mast, plus any halyard blocks that lead halyards and kickers off from

where a level-stepped spar passes through the deck. All these should be checked with care, because while they may seem good enough untricked, they can tell a different story when the huge bill of a halyard comes on. If in doubt, replace them with modern, open-sheave blocks with ball or roller bearings. These grand modern fittings will make a huge difference, just as they do for a genoa sheet furling block.

Reduce friction in furling beadsails



A flat masthead rope block may feel more comfortable, but make sure it's not too big for whatever it has to pass through or it'll work around the boat.



A good quality, open-sheave turning block with ball bearings makes a world of difference when handling lines.

'Lessons we learned the hard way...'

Cruising veterans share the wisdom they've learned in the 'school of hard knockdowns'

Anyone who has ever gotten sailing news from some kind of cook-up. We've all consumed our fair share of misleading headlines and gained valuable knowledge from the experience. Hardly seen as a source of humor are among the hallmarks of a good riposte, and it's never when the ability to laugh at, and learn from, our mistakes.

A host of highly experienced cruising sailors generously bare their souls over the next eight pages, but even the average idiot, like me, can learn from his mistakes.

To kick things off, here's what I learned from one of my own recent rock-ups...

Pride comes before a pratfall

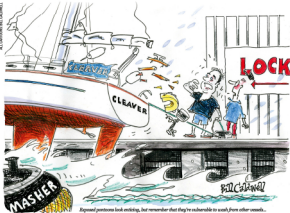


Kieren Platt, Tackling Weekly editor
I'd become strong about sailing into portside slipways, without using the engine. After a season dogged by breakdowns, I'd had plenty of practice! The tired old doryman seemed to be running sweetly following the latest round of repairs, so I slipped my lines on a chilly autumn day to give it a good run. After anchoring for lunch, I was agghed but not surprised when it failed to fire up, and my lungs pradding with a voltmeter failed to locate the problem. Moping just and calling an expert was a given. The tide was rising and I'd be aground within an hour. In any case my mobile phone battery was dead.

Hey ho, another wind-against-tide approach to the waiting portside outside the lock. This I performed with poise, and a day carefully recommended me as Clever's leaders liked the dock and I stopped off with the lines. I was halfway through a probably beautiful explanation of the manoeuvre when his eyes widened - in admiration, perhaps? Just then, a gnat's splintering crab pranced my over-inflated ego as a stray wave of rag-wash hurled Clever against the dock, turning her task toward to matchwood.

Lessons learned

- Exposed portside lock brailing, but watch from passing ships can wreck your day. If there's cause for concern, anchor instead.
- A jaunty little tugboat can generate neither wave nor a 200,000-ton tanker.
- Task tools are very expensive to replace.
- Most sailors like to share their expertise, but beware of blowing your own trumpet!



Exposed portside lock brailing, but remember that they're vulnerable to work from other vessels.

Have a cup of tea and think things through



Pete Goss, ocean adventurer
I was at the top of the mast in a blow with all the tools to hand - apart from the allen key for the grab screw. If only I'd taken the time to plan and visualise! Not only would I have had it with me, but it would have been in the right side-pocket of the boss's chair for the job, with a lanyard. I've never forgotten the second tortuous climb, or the breaks. It has never happened again.

Lessons learned

- Have a cup of tea while you plan and visualise the job in detail. It sounds basic, but it isn't. Use this simple approach for any scenario. If you're alone.

Know your weaknesses



Bill Anderson, founder of the RYA's Yachtmaster scheme
I was a 20 year old skipper on my first cross-Channel cruise in an engine-less cutter. I was in the Rye in Peter Port. The passage from Weymouth had been slower than expected. There was now a strong, fair tide and we arrived off the narrows and of the Little Bore just as darkness fell. The wind lifted in hard from the south, there was a clap of thunder and the heavens opened. The passage plan was made on the assumption of a westerly wind and the ability to follow a series of leading lines and transits. Quite how we made it while changing headings, rolling down rock and trying to keep track of where we were as we beat through with five knots of steam behind us, remains a mystery. Luck rather than skill was the dominant factor.

Thank goodness a few years to another dark evening and a misadventure on passage towards a misadventure off the entrance to the Bristol River. Suddenly the alarm blared - a total darkness - power failure. As the navigator, I quickly realised that I had to switch from gyro to magnetic compass. No problem, apply variations and deviation, simple.

Ten minutes later the signalman tapped me on the shoulder and offered me his binoculars. 'Look down ahead sir, I think you'll be able to make out a red buoy, getting pretty closer.' I did and he was quite right. An immediate turn to seaward helped avoid a disaster.

Lessons learned

- There are incidents, both of which could well have ended in disaster, my eyes being totally untrained then were the early warning signs of the way I have most often called myself into danger in both I was faced with a sudden change of circumstances and in both I concentrated on finding the original objective. In both I could have taken more time to decide whether pressing on was really the sensible thing to do.

Over general plenty of time to prepare for a job - and make sure you have the right tools with you to do it.



I suspect that most of us have an Achilles' heel. Mine is probably a tendency to press on when a little time spent considering the changing circumstances - deciding to go well of Guernsey or checking that I had actually applied the variation and deviation the right way - would have averted potential disaster. Ask yourself if your epic has a pattern to them.

Aground on an ebb tide



Duncan Wells, RYA Yachtmaster instructor
I'd been out filming and photographing lapins on woods and bays, since dusk. At 0200, I was at the mouth of the River Hamble, returning back to my berth. However, I couldn't resist filming the vector light at the entrance to the river, running from the green sector to the white, to the red.

Perfect. Stupid that suddenly I appeared to have had stopped. I looked up to find port-bard marker post No 8 just off my starboard bow. Ooops! It should have been

off my port bow. I put the engine astern. Nothing. Aground on an ebb tide. Not very clever.

I didn't feel inclined to stay the night, though I probably deserved the inconvenience for my lack of attention. And as an RYA instructor, I couldn't have the embarrassment of crying for help over the VHF radio. So I called the coastguard on the radio, on my mobile phone, explained my position, advised them I was not in danger and quite happy to do my time on the shingle, but if Hamble Lightboat happened to be around...

Fifteen minutes later I was hauled a line and after one quick burst from their powerful RIB, Dorothy Lee and I were free. I sent them a cheque for the amount that Sea Start would have charged me.

Lessons learned

- Do not close down on the early hours of the morning.
- Try to concentrate on one job to such an extent that you are no longer in overall control of the boat.

■ Never choose a grounding on an ebb tide.