

# Blue note

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn learnt about anchoring the hard way, and reckons most cruisers are the same

**A**s a liveaboard sailor there is nothing better than dropping the hook and spending the night at anchor. You can pick a beautiful secluded spot and the boat becomes your own little island of tranquillity. The trick of being content with your spacing is something that comes with the more experience you gain, as you just develop a feel and a knack for doing it well.

Early on in our cruising days we were anchored on the west coast of Portugal in the late autumn when the weather is notoriously fickle. Upon checking the latest conditions we saw that the wind was going to change direction and realised to our deep dismay that we had miscalculated our position within a very tidal anchorage. If we didn't move the boat we would go aground at the next low water, in the early hours of the morning. While not a great situation to be in, at least we had realised our mistake in time and got up at 4am to move the boat into deeper water. However, as we slowly motored to a suitable spot in the eerie dawn light, me at the bow and James at the wheel, the wind had picked up and started howling so we had to scream out our instructions to each other. I looked up and suddenly felt all the blood drain from my face. There, a few metres away, was another monohull heading straight towards us at speed, accelerated by the wind and current, with no lights on and no-one at the helm. We were about to be T-boned.

I squawked out a very loud and short swear word, along with the word "BOOAT!", barely audible over the blast of the gale, but it was descriptive enough for James to swiftly steer us so that we were now head on to the other yacht. The logic of this was that a collision might be easier to avoid if we were bow-to-bow as we could escape with just a glancing blow rather than have another vessel crashing into our beam. Luckily, we didn't even touch and we stared in horror as the "ghost boat" sped silently past us and eventually ploughed into the shore next to another wreck. It had broken free from its mooring that night and there was no one on board to hear our shouts and warnings.



ILLUSTRATION: AIMEE JEWITT-HARRIS

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But a close call in the night-time doesn't necessarily mean high drama and strong winds. The following year, in Panama, we were buddy-boating with friends on a catamaran and pulled up next to them in a bay. We wanted to be anchored nearby and the forecast showed that no wind was expected so we cosied right up to them, a distance that some would call too friendly. But the water was deep so we also needed to put out a lot of chain. Catamarans and monohulls behave like very different beasts when left to idle and dance in the water, free from the effects of wind or current. And I wasn't happy with our final position once we'd dropped the hook. "I think we should move, we're anchored too close to them," I said.

James reassured me, but I was still grumbling. Sure enough that night we were woken by a little "bump" and scrambled up on deck to be greeted by the equally sleepy and surprised

faces of our mates who were good natured enough to say "Fancy seeing you here!" rather than blaming us for the situation. In the stillness the two boats had gently bounced together. But, minor though the impact was, it was bound to be repeated over the course of the night if we didn't do something. In the name of a good night's sleep our solution was to fender up, raft the two boats together with several lines given the mild conditions and all go back to bed to deal with detangling in the morning. Thankfully they were nice about it and James only had to put up with a day or two of my I-told-you-so smugness.

Fortunately, we've come a long way since then, learning more and more about just how our boat moves and swings in every different set of conditions. The great lesson with any kind of anchoring blunder is to realise and rectify your mistake before your boat (or anyone else's) gets into any real trouble. Because the true beauty of the sailing community is that everyone has developed their own know-how from a similar set of embarrassing incidents and encounters. Sure, they're hair-raising and somewhat humiliating at the time but, so long as you do improve, these bumps will be only to your ego rather than your boat. ✦



## HAVE YOUR SAY

What's your most embarrassing anchoring incident?

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