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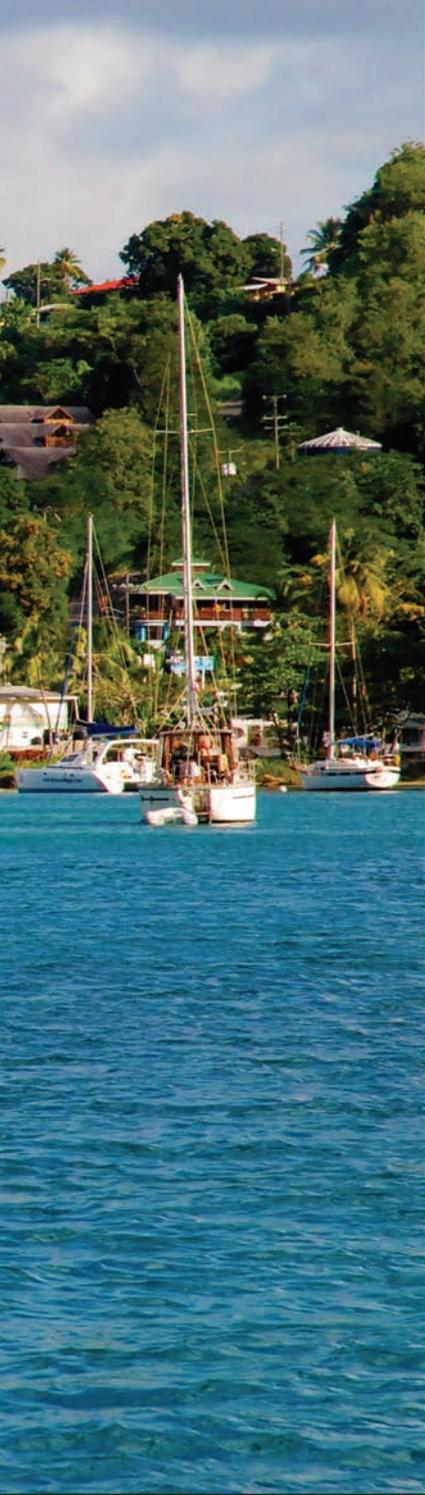
Too Close For Comfort

By Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn



I have long been aware that there is a fine art to anchoring well. It's something that varies with each boat, each anchorage and the conditions that you're presented with and it's only on the rare occasions when someone gets it wrong that you truly appreciate the skills involved in doing it right.

We have an additional member of crew on board for a while, providing us with some extra help now that we're sailing with an infant. This puts me in the slightly uncomfortable position of not only having to relinquish some of my usual jobs and duties, but also to train another person in the skills that I have spent the last few years learning. He's young, enthusiastic and has quite a lot of common sense but, in spite of this, I found that surrendering the helm while anchoring was the task that I was the most reluctant to part with.

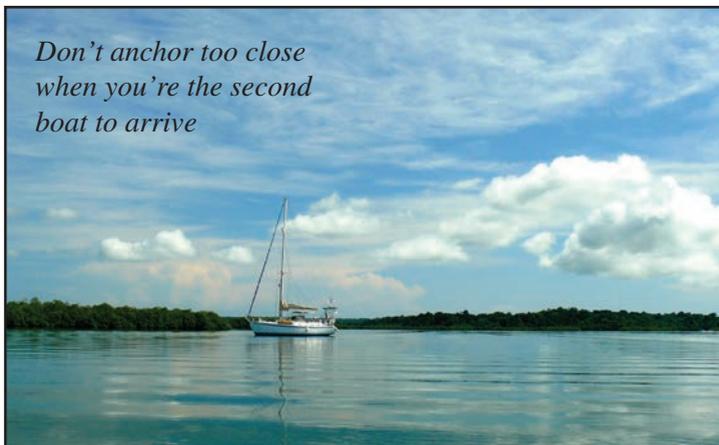


*Boats anchored either
side of a channel, cats
and monos - Martinique*

Although James and I now have two ocean crossings and a substantial number of miles under our cruising belts, we always look at our experience and abilities as very much a work in progress. There is always room for improvement, a better method to master and more to learn. I think it's an aspect of the sailing life that is incredibly satisfying and helps to keep you humble.

Having said all that, I'm also conscious that I'm really proud of my talent for anchoring. Since leaving Europe we have always approached finding the right spot to anchor in with me at the wheel, James at the bow. We get into a position we like, we nod in agreement and I stop the boat in a flash while he drops anchor and we then use the wind or the tide to help us in laying out the chain. Feeding out the correct amount of chain or making sure that the anchor is well set and dug in are easy enough elements to teach to our new crew as they don't take long to get the knack of. But I've found that the real mystifying flair lies in knowing exactly where to place the hook in order to end up with the final happy positioning of your yacht in relation to every other one in the anchorage.

You need to really know how your boat moves in wind and tide and then add that to what you can deduce about each of the surrounding boats and whether they're lying taut or idle on their chains. For example, as a monohull owner, I prefer to not anchor next to a catamaran, or a full-keeled sailboat as I know they will dance in



*Don't anchor too close
when you're the second
boat to arrive*



the current very differently from us. Likewise, you read the immediate topography of the land and water, anticipating which directions you may get wind gusts or strong currents from, if there are forecasted shifts in the weather and if any of that will affect the other vessels contrarily in relation to you.

Above all you need to be totally satisfied about the depth you're in and what changes the tide may make to where your boat sits. You have to assume what depths the other boats may be sitting in, how generous they're likely to be with the scope of chain or rode they lay out and keep your eyes ever vigilant for whether there are additional stern anchors set. The difference between where you drop and where you'll eventually sit, either when lazing on the chain or pulling back on it, is a calculation that takes precision and practice. Sometimes the greatest challenge is to enter an anchorage when there is no wind blowing at all and every boat is floating about, all pointing in different directions and you can only wildly guess at where each anchor may be.

However, just how close is, in fact, too close is a matter of great subjectivity. It varies massively from anchorage to anchorage, country to country and is a mixture of habit, etiquette and what order people arrived in. A single boat, anchored off a pristine beach, is likely to be

disappointed once another boat finds that same slice of paradise, and anchors a measly boat length away, unless they're friends of course. Yachts tend to cluster in a formation, filling in gaps in between until any given anchorage becomes jam-packed. But being able to hear music booming from a neighbour, the incessant intrusion of running a noisy generator or an all too close-up view of the occupant using the next boat's stern shower are all downfalls of being that little bit too crowded. From Portugal to the British Virgin Islands to Tahiti, we've experienced some pretty busy anchorages where being quite so full to capacity makes you seriously concerned about the consequences of a shift in weather. We tend to prefer a middle ground, where you can be near enough for a shouted greeting or wave, but feel you have your own privacy and room too.

The trick of being content with the spacing is something that simply comes with the more anchoring experience you gain, which is why it's hard to articulate to a beginner. Yet it was in a fairly spacious bay that I was able to demonstrate to our crew what defined 'too close' for me. It was good mud holding but really very deep water, so each boat had a considerable amount of scope out. Fortunately there was plenty of room for this, which added to our surprise when, just as the sun set,



a catamaran anchored immediately off our beam. Now, to clarify, this was snug enough that they could talk at a normal, quiet volume and we could hear every word from our cockpit. In my book that's certainly uncomfortable anyhow, but we were especially wary of them given that we were in 20 metres of water with more than 60 metres of chain out. However, their skipper was clearly not unnerved by this and everyone settled for the night.

By 2:00 a.m. the next morning there were gusts of 25-30 knots and, having dragged on no less than three occasions through the rest of the anchored fleet, this same boat motored back towards us, dropping anchor well within our swinging circle again. My sense of charity had worn thin by

then and I pointed out the problem, the differences in our boats, the depth, the strong gusts and the impending damage. Heads were scratched, shoulders shrugged and they offered the farcical solution of merely putting fenders out along their starboard side before all filing off to bed once more. It was with a little gratification that I noticed our novice crew staring at this action with disbelief and muttering to himself, "Are they just rather stupid or simply rude?"

Luckily we haven't met that style of sailor very often as we're normally a rather well-mannered bunch. But it did help with my explanation of the extreme case: close enough for a friendly wave is just fine, but too close is when nobody sleeps for fear of the outcome. 🇵🇸



Enough room for everyone