



Nautical Musings



by Captain Stan Glatzer

Early Lessons

I spent last Mother's Day weekend instructing five boat owners in "Powerboating 101." The group covered the gamut from a first time out to first-boat owner to a third-time skipper who wanted his marriage saved by having someone else teach his wife to handle the boat. The backgrounds of the group included a physician, a stockbroker, a former racecar driver/pilot/mechanic, a "promoter," and a house painter. The vessels included a brand new Larson 26, an '87 Century 26 cruiser, a new 26-foot bowrider, a new Bayliner 30, and a 25-foot '87 SeaRay.

The one thing common to all that was evident was the lack of familiarity with the boat each participant had. True, the experienced owner had some basic understanding in equipment and boat handling, but he surprisingly had not checked out all the compartments for access to through-hull fittings, bilge pumps, etc. Although all had safety equipment on board, complete understanding of the operation of fire extinguishers or the ability to rapidly access the flares or PFDs and other safety equipment was missing. PFDs were in some cases still in the wrappers, flares were buried under piles of gear, some fire extinguishers were not mounted as required. Dock lines were on board in the sealed wraps or not on board at all. Two students had no knowledge of the use of a combination anchor light and stern light mounted on a pole. All had spent thousands of dollars on their boats, yet only one owner knew which position on the battery switch did what.

Unfortunately, the operation of a boat is not like a car's. Automobiles operate pretty much the same regardless of make and size. We open the door and climb in. We start the car and steer. Parking and the rest are all done from the driver's seat and we stop the car and exit easily. The casting off, anchoring and docking requirements of boat operation requires coordination of balance, agility of legs and back and a thought process that involves predicting how our actions will enable the boat to "mesh" with the conditions. This meshing, or blending, with the waves, wind and current enables the skipper to maintain control of the vessel. He (or she) will make the boat respond to commands and he will not react to incidents not predicted.

Starting in Seaford aboard the Larson, after checking out the boat, we were delayed from leaving the dock by dead batteries. Finally, with a boost from the yard and the motor warmed, we pulled out slowly...and hit the dock across the canal! The student had waited to react to the

boat's course instead of steering to where he wanted to go. Lesson one: Learn how to use the throttle at idle speed while secured to the dock. Go through reverse, neutral, and forward gears and get the feel of the control. On an I/O there is no rudder so the result is, no power, no steering. As we tried again the boat stalled and we came up against the Danforth anchor's "bull horns" on a boat in a slip. (No power, no steering....no damage!!!)

Another battery boost and we were away in the channel. After a session of steering and throttle control we came side to at the dock and secured the boat. Lessons learned: Prepared dock lines make docking easier. "Wow, there is a lot to learn!!!"

The purchaser of the SeaRay 24 got a "real good deal." The boat was priced right and in good shape. All the equipment was on board and we went through the check out easily. We even found out where the bilge was and what it was for. I credit the owner, a non-swimmer for wearing a PFD at my request, even though it was a horse-collar, Type 2 and nearly choked his stocky neck. Pulling out from the slip was successful and relatively non-eventful. The time on the Bay was spent learning to back up and circle and stop at predetermined spots. Like all new owners the desire to go out and 'drive the boat' at highway speeds is strong. We must crawl around the docks under control before we hit the 'road.'

Upon returning to the slip the student had no desire to dock the boat, but under some guidance, did a plausible job. Tying up the dock lines to the piling and dock required the skipper to climb through the windshield to go forward. His lack of agility and non-swimming skills caused him to exclaim, "No way!" We secured to the dock and the owner told me that if I knew anyone who wanted to buy a boat, I should let him know. Here was a buyer that definitely purchased the wrong boat for his physical abilities. A walk around or a center console would have been a better choice. "This is too much work," were his words. He had expected to turn a key and drive his Porsche.

The Bayliner 30's skipper was adept at running the boat and was learning to dock a twin-screw I/O. The checkout procedure opened his eyes to some new items on safety. I went through-line handling with him and his wife. We preset spring lines, bow lines and stern lines, securing them to the boat. Maneuvering at various speeds and in different configurations we trimmed power-tilt and trim tabs,

learning how to trim out. Minor defects on the vessel were noted to report to the dealer. The wife operated the vessel for awhile and we returned to the dock with the owner at the helm and his Mrs. handling the dock lines. Lessons learned were that twin I/Os do not handle like a twin-screw inboard boat and docking does not always have to be stern to.

Running a 25-foot bowrider through the Quogue Canal to Shinnecock and performing exercises in boat handling after checking out the boat was next on the parade. Notes were made for the dealer and navigation around shoals was practiced. Mud digging was performed when the skipper tried to go around a fisherman drifting in the channel and left the channel doing so (drifting). Lesson learned: Go slow when in doubt and you will be "kissed on the cheek instead of slapped in the face." This skipper showed great promise in becoming a competent boater.

The last adventure was on a Century 25. The owner bought a tired boat with a new engine. Figuring on good mechanical service and not worrying about a few dings while learning seemed like a good decision. We left the slip after an enlightening checkout. The boat's condition was not at all like it was said to be. (A surveyor or a knowledgeable friend would have been helpful.) Transiting the Creek and entering Great South Bay, the engine stalled. The anchor was preset at 60 feet of rode and we set it off the bow. A clammer offered a tow and was accepted. The engine was tried again and it started so we cast off and, with some trepidation and guidance, the student docked successfully. Lesson learned: Never say, "I never anchor." New engines have problems also.

The weekend was far from normal, but it was not totally without precedence. All the students were eager to learn. All said they learned a lot that they did not expect, even though some of what they learned was not enjoyable.

The experience of boating is one that is fulfilling and broadening. Like life it has its ups and downs. Preparing for your boating requires research into the type of boating you expect to do and whether you are up to the demands of that type of boat and boating will place on you and your family. Develop a skipper's mentality: Look at the total big picture and you will enjoy a sport that is a way of life.

