



# GIVING BERTH

Whether you are cruising along the coast, exploring a new beach or cove, going for a blast through a harbour or simply dragging the kids around on a ringo or wakeboard, unless you are 'in the trade' you go ribbing to have fun, relax, and probably to get away from the day job ...

**E**verything you do on board should be pretty relaxing, and certainly no part of your time out on the water should spoil the memories of a great day out. For many boaters (me included when I started out – and even now on occasions!), the thing that can make life less relaxing than it should be is the need to manoeuvre the RIB into a difficult berth or alongside a jetty or onto a trailer when there is a chunk of wind, the tide or current is running, and for sure there is an audience!

In this article we'll start to look at manoeuvring a boat alongside a pontoon, and throw in a few tricks and tips that can make life easier; after all, if we can make this bit straightforward, then we'll have an even better day out.

If you've been on a Level

2 course or are thinking about it, you should find that before the instructor starts getting you to drive alongside a pontoon, he or she will get you undertaking some manoeuvres around mooring buoys to develop some firm foundations before building up to approaching hard objects – the pontoons. As mentioned in the previous article, the first of these is typically driving a figure of eight around two mooring buoys, as this gives you an appreciation of the way wind and tide push the boat around and, equally, how you can drive the boat to ensure that it is you in charge rather than these elements.

The next task I introduce is aimed to give an appreciation of how you can control the RIB with subtle use of the steering and throttle. In an area of clear

water, point the bow straight into the wind and stop. Once the RIB is stopped, if there is a bit of wind, then pretty rapidly the bow will drop to the left or right and the RIB will sit beam-on to the wind. Why does the RIB do this and why should you care? How quickly the RIB does this, and therefore how much it affects you, is a function of the length of the RIB, its weight and how stern-heavy it is. Most boats, RIBs included, are stern-heavy and this weight at the stern acts as an anchor while the light bow is pushed downwind. The RIB reaches its 'happy position' either when at 90° to the wind or with the bow slightly further downwind. Knowing this happens and that the RIB will move in this way is a key lesson in close-quarter handling, because if you can predict the way your

boat reacts, then you can either use the movement to your advantage or prevent it happening. In doing so you are proactive rather than reactive and it is you, rather than the elements, that is in charge.

## Steer then gear

Positioning the RIB back with the bow straight into the wind, centralise your steering and watch for the bow to start to drop off. If it goes left, then steer right and engage the throttle briefly to push it back; if it goes right, then steer left etc. The mistake many people make here is to either not point the steering before engaging the throttle or to overcook how long they are in gear for. 'Steer then gear' is a key teaching point for instructors and simply means that by positioning the steering before engaging

the throttle, the kick we get in the direction we want is instantaneous. Being in gear too long just pushes the bow the other way – get into the habit of accumulating very short dabs of throttle to achieve an objective, rather than long ones, which can add too much momentum. This task very quickly gets you to grips with a boat, and even experienced boaters benefit from practising this, as it ensures they can keep the bow where they want it at any time.

If you want to move this task up a level, then try the alternate way of holding the bow into the wind. If the bow is dropping left then steer left and go astern, or steer right if the bow is going right. If you really like a challenge in a bit of wind, create a notional cross on the water and combine these techniques to hold the bow dead straight into the wind while holding a precise position – fun and useful practice!

Approaching a mooring buoy is one of the other key tasks you should perform on a Level 2 course before entering the marina for some pontoon work. The mooring buoy is generally soft and forgiving and has plenty of space around it, so it is a great way to practise the skills you will need to

move alongside a pontoon. Approaching a mooring buoy is a simple exercise if you get the basics right – speed of approach and direction of approach. The simplest way to work out the direction of approach is to apply one of two tests: firstly, if there are other boats on adjacent moorings with a similar hull shape to your boat and they are not aground or tethered at both ends, then this is your direction; if there

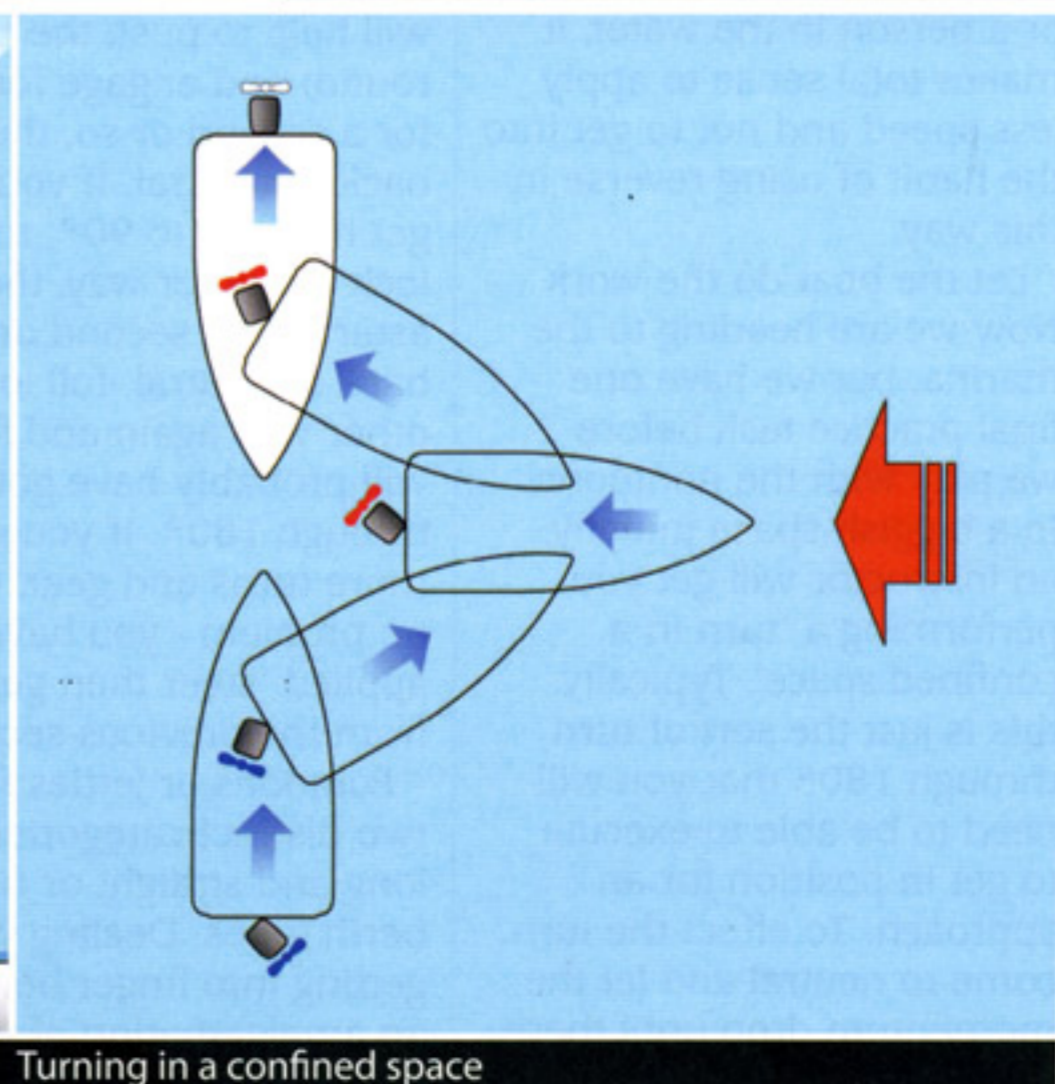
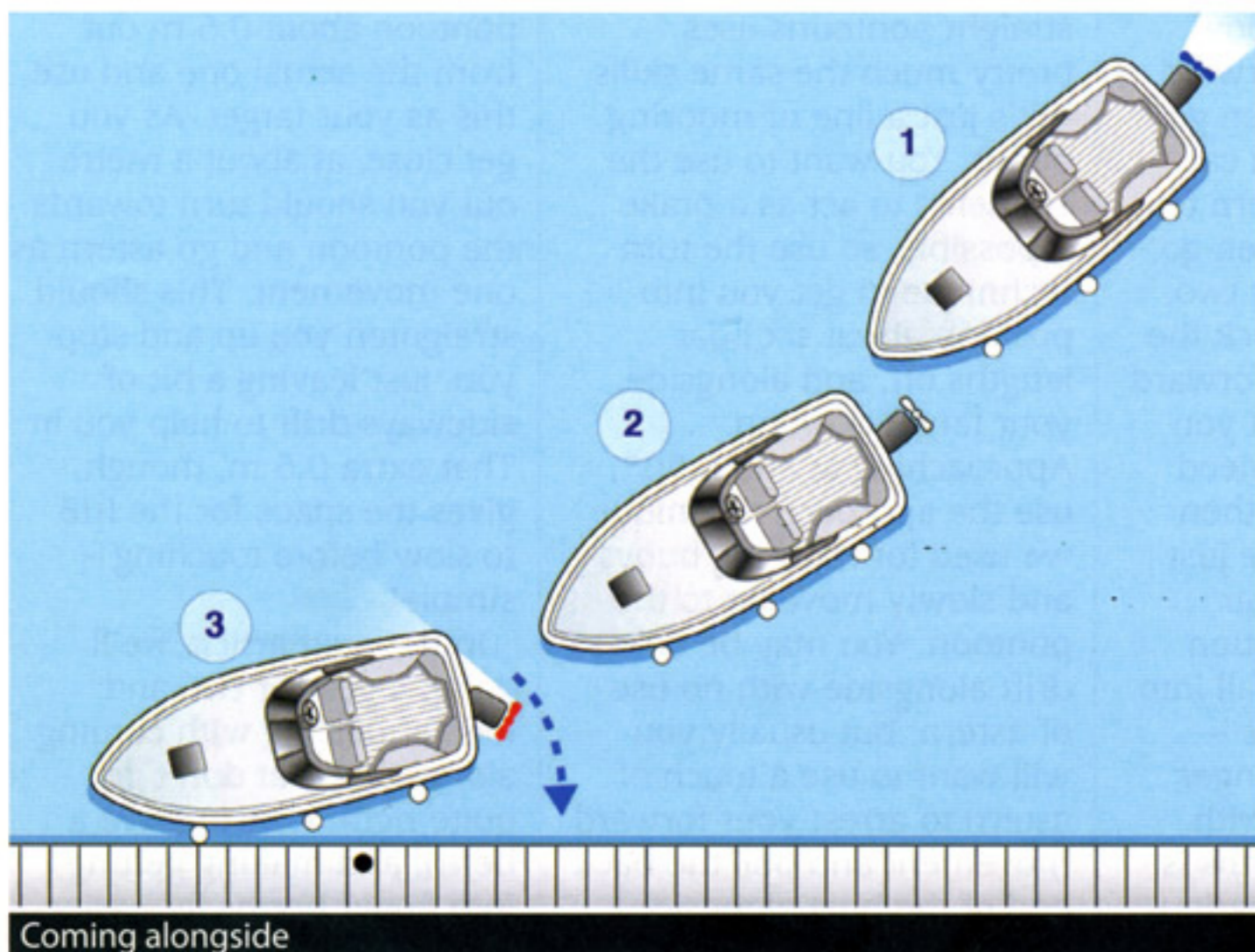
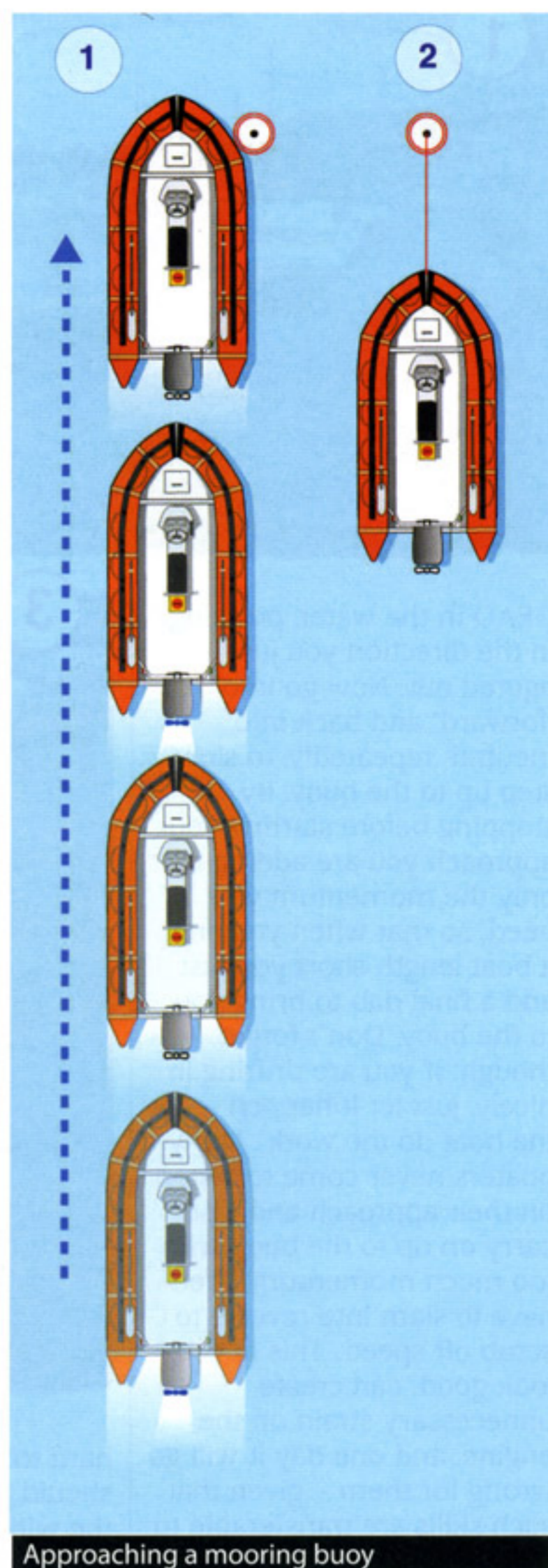
**Many boaters never come to a stop on their approach and just carry on up to the buoy with too much momentum ...**

aren't other boats, then stop near the buoy and let the boat drift – your direction of approach is the opposite of your direction of drift. Both methods give you the same result – an approach into the combined effects of wind and tide/current. Irrespective of how much of either element there is, these methods 'do the maths' for you – simple!

Next, you need to get the start position right, as approaching from too close can just make life more difficult than it needs to be. Position the RIB about six boat lengths away from the mooring buoy and STOP



This article covers subjects found in the RYA Powerboat Handbook written by Paul Glatzel of Powerboat Training UK in Poole. ([www.powerboattraininguk.co.uk](http://www.powerboattraininguk.co.uk)). Images, photos and text are copyright Paul Glatzel and the RYA. The RYA Powerboat Handbook was written to support the RYA Powerboat Scheme and is available from [www.rya.org.uk/shop](http://www.rya.org.uk/shop).





DEAD in the water, pointing in the direction you just figured out. Now go into 'forward' and back into 'neutral' repeatedly, to slowly step up to the buoy. By stopping before starting your approach you are adding in only the momentum you need, so that when you are a boat length short you just add a final dab to bring you to the buoy. Don't forget, though: if you are drifting in nicely, just let it happen – 'let the boat do the work'. Many boaters never come to a stop on their approach and just carry on up to the buoy with too much momentum, then have to slam into reverse to scrub off speed. This doesn't look good, can create unnecessary strain on the engine, and one day it will go wrong for them – given that such skills are transferable to coming alongside a pontoon or a person in the water, it makes total sense to apply less speed and not to get into the habit of using reverse in this way.

Let the boat do the work Now we are heading to the marina, but we have one final practice task before we play with the pontoons. In a biggish space initially, an instructor will get you performing a 'turn in a confined space'. Typically this is just the sort of turn through 180° that you will need to be able to execute to get in position for an approach. To effect the turn, come to neutral and let the momentum drop until there is just some movement. Turn



Gently does it! Easy as one, two, three

hard to the left or right (you should point the bow into the wind if it is coming from your left or right – the wind will help to push the bow round) and engage forward for a second or so, then go back to neutral. If you can get the bow to 90°, turn full lock the other way, then go astern for a second or two, back to neutral, full lock the other way again and forward will probably have got you through 180°. If you need more turns and gear, then no problem - you have just applied 'steer then gear' from the previous section.

Pontoons or jetties fall into two distinct categories – long and straight or finger berth types. Dealing with getting into finger berths is an amalgamation of various techniques, so we'll start

with the long, straight ones! Given that you successfully approached the mooring buoy, nailing the long, straight pontoons uses pretty much the same skills – it's just a line of mooring buoys. You want to use the elements to act as a brake if possible, so use the turn technique to get you into position about six boat lengths off, and alongside, your target position. Approaching at about 30°, use the approach technique we used for mooring buoys and slowly move up to the pontoon. You may be able to drift alongside with no use of astern, but usually you will want to use a touch of astern to arrest your forward movement and pull the back end of the boat alongside. The mistake often made here

is to leave going astern too late, so you end up bouncing off the pontoon. It often helps to create an imaginary pontoon about 0.5 m out from the actual one and use this as your target. As you get close, at about a metre out you should turn towards the pontoon and go astern as one movement. This should straighten you up and stop you, just leaving a bit of sideways drift to help you in. That extra 0.5 m, though, gives the space for the RIB to slow before touching – simple!

In the next article we'll go up a gear or two and look at dealing with coming alongsides that don't go quite right, how to leave a berth, and making getting into finger berths far easier.

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