

# PRACTICAL SEAMANSHIP

Tom Cunliffe is a Yachtmaster Instructor Examiner who has sailed hundreds of thousands of miles around the world



## 10 top tips for competent crew

When Tom Cunliffe was compiling tips for how to be a great crew, he asked the best crew he's ever sailed with – his wife Ros



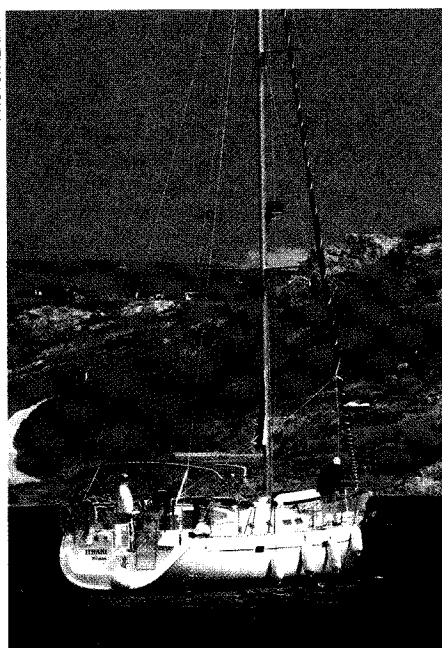
Ros Cunliffe has been crewing for 40 years

**M**y wife Ros has been 'crewing' for me for 40 years. She'd never been on a boat when I met her, she's never been on a course of any sort and doesn't have a ticket to her name, but she's the complete 'able seaman'. When looking around for 10 key tips for novice crew, what better person to ask? Here is the list that she came up with:

### 1 Anticipation

The skipper's a busy person with a lot to think about. Crew jobs are relatively 'two-dimensional', but preparation is the secret. Take coming alongside, for example. Crew should start securing fenders and running out lines at least 10 minutes before the boat is berthed. That leaves plenty of time to ask the skipper how he wants things organised. Leave it till the last minute, and you give him or her an extra layer of hassle just when they're shoe-horning the boat into that tricky marina finger.

PHOTO: ALAMAY



A competent crew should get all the fenders and lines rigged well in advance – ideally at least 10 minutes before the yacht comes alongside

### 2 Keep a tight ship

It might be OK to dump that fleece you don't need over a chair at home, but it won't do on board. Boats are small places, and if everyone left their kit lying around, the crew would be at one another's throats in no time. Stow your gear, keep it stowed, and stay happy.

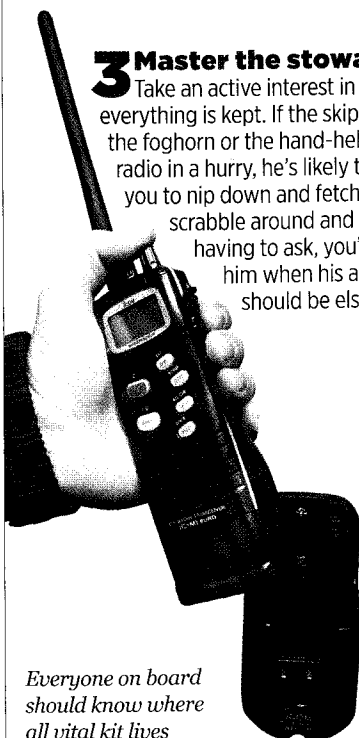


PHOTO: COLIN WORK/PXSTEL.COM

Loose gear is a hazard at sea, so keep it stowed

### 3 Master the stowage

Take an active interest in where everything is kept. If the skipper needs the foghorn or the hand-held VHF radio in a hurry, he's likely to ask you to nip down and fetch it. If you scabble around and end up having to ask, you'll distract him when his attention should be elsewhere.



Everyone on board should know where all vital kit lives



PHOTO: GRAHAM SNOOK

Your first solo night watch is a major milestone

### 4 Never be afraid to call

It's a great moment when you're given your first night watch. The skipper's asleep and he's relying on you alone to keep the ship and her people safe. You don't have to be hugely experienced. What you do need is common sense and the confidence to call the boss when anything happens that you're not expecting or can't cope with. Just give him a quiet shake. If he knows you'll do it, he can relax and sleep. If not, he may as well have stayed on deck.



## 5 Tea in the face

When you're detailed off to make the tea, don't fill the mugs anywhere near the top. They'll either spill or the top half-inch will blow into the skipper's face on a windy day. Two-thirds full is a good rule of thumb.

## 6 Coming alongside

There are one or two right ways to secure a yacht alongside, and hundreds of wrong ones. Whichever your skipper chooses, make sure you understand fully what is expected of you. If he hasn't told you, ask in good time. There's no sadder sight than a confused crewman standing on a dock, holding a rope that he doesn't know what to do with.



PHOTO: GRAHAM SNOOK

*Berthing: ensure that you know what's expected of you in advance*



PHOTO: COLIN WORK/PIXTEL.COM

*Stand right over the winch to gain maximum mechanical advantage*

## 7 Winching in

If the sheet winches are a muscle job on a windy day, it's no good cowering in the cockpit and holding the handle at arm's length. Take courage, get one foot out on the sidedeck and your whole weight directly over the winch barrel. Now try winding. It's a different world!

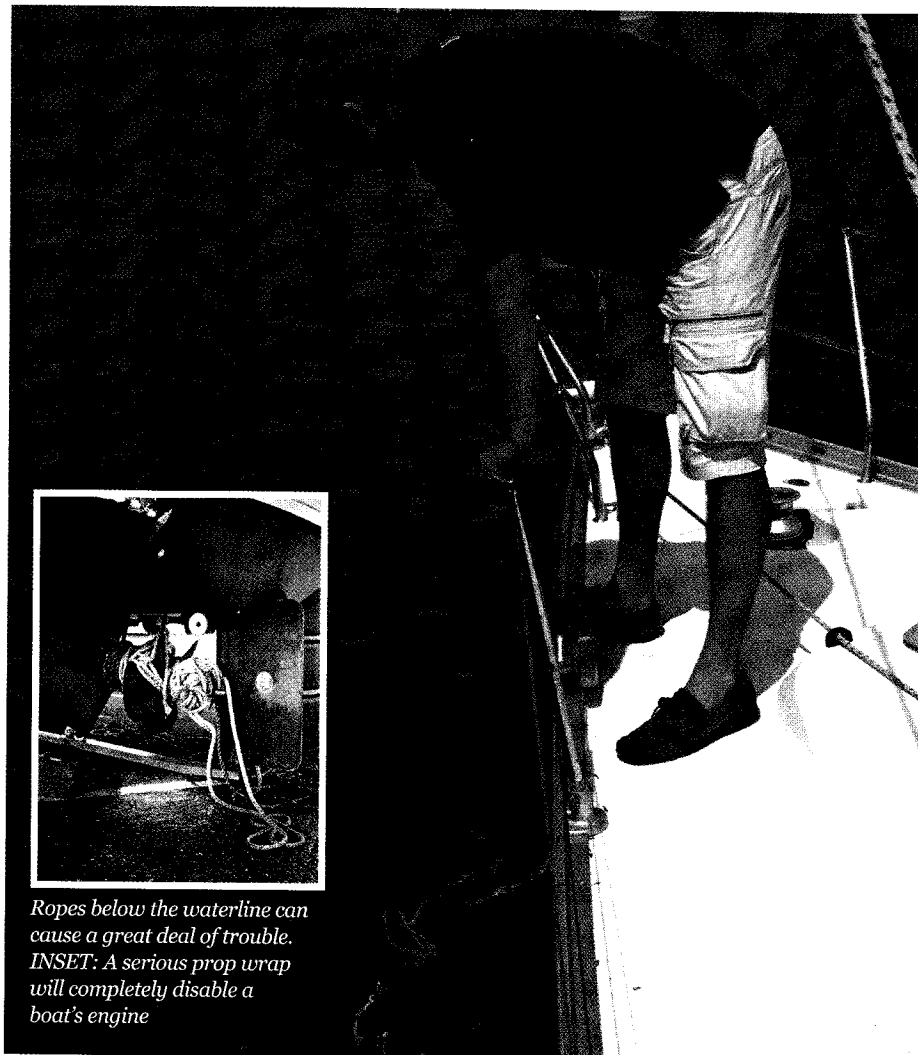
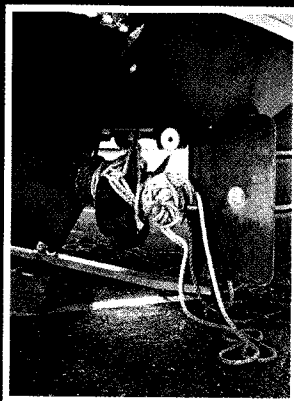


PHOTO: LESTER MCCARTHY



*Ropes below the waterline can cause a great deal of trouble. INSET: A serious prop wrap will completely disable a boat's engine*

## 8 Easing out

Loads on sheets can be pretty massive, and they're concentrated on that winch barrel. To ease a sheet out, remove the end from the cleat or jammer, then place the flat of your hand on the turns. Slack away the end and help the turns to 'crack' around the barrel with your hand until the load is sufficiently easy to take a turn or two off and ease the whole thing. If you're tacking, ease a little, then whip off all the turns by pulling directly up on the end. Your job isn't complete until someone has winched the headsail in on the other side. Your sheet can jam all too easily and ruin the manoeuvre, so watch it all the way.

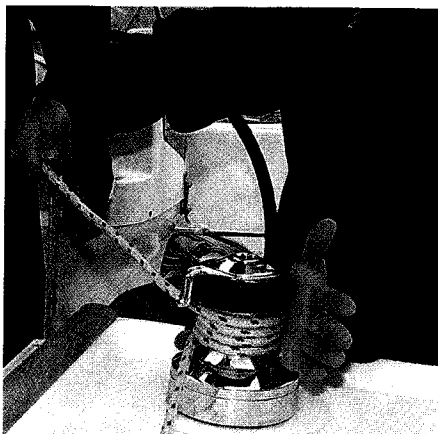


PHOTO: COLIN WORK/PIXTEL.COM

*Easing out: put the flat of one hand against the turns and help them to 'crack' around the barrel*

## 9 Keep 'em dry

A classic horror in boat handling is when a turning propeller grabs a rope left dangling in the water. The result is a totally disabled engine - usually just when you don't want one. Be constantly aware of this when using ropes, either berthing or even when handling sheets offshore, and do not let it happen.



PHOTO: COLIN WORK/PIXTEL.COM

*Bringing in the ensign at sunset and deploying it again in the morning halves wear and tear*

## 10 Ensign duty

It isn't old-fashioned to bring in your colours at sunset and set them at 0800. It's just plain seamanlike. Make it your duty and pleasure to ensure this happens every day. It does wonders for pride in the ship. ▲

■ *The Bénéteau Océanis 36cc featured in some of the photos in this article is for sale through Waterside Boat Sales at Port Solent. Tel: 02392 377466, Web: [www.watersideboatsales.com](http://www.watersideboatsales.com)*