

Tech Tips #19 - Cruising Lessons

By Bill Whitney

I don't have my logs or a chart in front of me as I write this, but based on previous years' logs the Buzzards Bay Fleet averages almost 400 nautical miles each year on our round trip excursion from Cape Cod, MA to the shores of Rockland, ME and beyond. We don't claim to be expert cruisers, but we are getting pretty darn good at it and we have a lot of fun along the way. Over the years we have coped with anchor, engine, electrical and bilge pump problems, and the full range of navigation, accommodation, and even restaurant reservation issues. We dealt with the difficulties, learned from them, had a wonderful time in the process, and importantly, we did it in the company of fellow cruisers. It's sort of like bringing your own maritime support group with you. As the saying goes, there's safety in number

Based on our experience I would like to offer something of a challenge: join us!! Better still, get your own local fleet together and become cruisers. It will make you better sailors. This excerpt from "How to Sail Around the World" by Hal Roth, reaches a little beyond what I'm advocating but it makes an important point.

"Cruising under sail is a hundredfold more complex than merely buying a suitable yacht. We know this because the marinas and harbors of the world are dotted with private pleasure craft, most of which go nowhere at all. There are tens of thousands of boat owners but very few sailors. Pay attention to this phrase: lots of boat owners but very few sailors. And a sailor you must be if you're going to try ocean voyaging. You need a modicum of sailing aptitude, some ability to fix things, and the willingness to pitch in and work.

Most veteran long-distance small-boat sailors are free spirits who fall into the classification of restless adventurer and who are always looking at distant horizons and trying new things. These spooky engineers usually lack fancy certificates, but they've all served fairly intensive apprenticeships and have learned a good bit about the sea, the care of their vessels, and the management of themselves.

To learn the fundamentals of sailing, you need to go to a special school for a few weeks. You will be taken out in a dinghy or small vessel for instruction in sail handling, tacking, gybing, docking, maneuvering in restricted waters, and following safety procedures. Then you must practice as often as possible and serve as crew for friends on their yachts.

In the beginning, you will only be a grunt, but little by little it will come to you. Every time you sail on a different vessel, you learn a thing or two because each captain has his own way of doing things. You need to find out about anchors and rigging, and to get some notion of sanding and painting and fixing things because life under sail is a never-ending round of maintenance, modifications, and large and small repairs."

Now, if you grew up in and around boats, you won't need a special school to teach you the rudiments of sailing, but regardless of your level of formal training, the best way to advance any of your skills is to use them. Add the safety and fun factor of sailing in a small fleet of friends in Friendship sloops, and you have the best learning environment imaginable. So find a like-minded soul or two, and come join us or plan your own cruise. See you on the water!