



**Canal &  
River Trust**

Making life better by water

## **More feedback on the subject of cruising past moored boats, from readers of Boaters' Update, May 2024.**

I have cruised the waterway system for 55 yrs & have seen changes in the way that boaters slow down when passing moored boats.

In the early days hire boats were the culprits regarding speeding but nowadays they are in general pretty sensible.

The main problem is with private boat owners who really do not understand the effect of their boat regarding the amount of water they draw when underway.

Many think that as long as they are not pulling a wash & they have made a token of dropping their revs, they are ok.

They are oblivious to how much water they are drawing which causes the problem to moored craft.

The safest way to be sure of not causing a problem to moored boats is to slow to tickover – there can be no argument then.

Anyone who is in such a rush as to not do this should not be on the canal.

Well done to the hire boat company's who seem to have won this discussion – shame private boaters cannot do the same.

By the way - I am a private boat owner!

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The topic of cruising speed past moored boats has been ongoing for many years, but I believe is generating more heat now because of the increased numbers of boats moored (almost permanently) along the towpath in places where boats rarely moored before.

Many of these boaters are simply using the canals as places to live, are new to the canal system and have little idea how to moor their craft safely.

Yes, it is clear that boats should slow down when passing others - but, as your article says, not to tickover. This is a two way issue with a responsibility on moorers to tie their boats up properly. I regularly see boats moored with their lines at totally the wrong angle, or moored with centre lines tight. Inevitably these boats will rock. And it is rare to see spring lines.

Years ago we moored at Saul on the Gloucester and Sharpness canal when BW were moving barge trains loaded with mud from Gloucester docks to be disposed into the estuary at Purton. There would be one tug and perhaps five lighters moving at some speed and creating a significant (water over the bank) tow and wash to moored boats (even though the canal is wide and deep). But we all had spring lines and big fenders so there was no problem.

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The speed limits are so tricky to define, since it depends so much on boat type and waterways.

If moored on a narrow shallow canal I would not be pleased to see a large steel hulled boat going past me at 4 mph, but would be fine if a small GRP cruiser were doing this speed. These are more manoeuvrable and disturb moored boats far less.

Secondly, width and depth of waterway. Rivers and broad canals can be safely used at higher speeds by any craft, without disturbing others.

Thirdly, it's annoying as a narrowboater to be forced down to 2 mph past a mile or more of moored boats, these. If faced with a series of these with a deadline any boater would become annoyed, and they are not uncommon.

The commonest speeding abuses in my experience are often by "old lags" - people who have become insensitive to others and maybe cynical and selfish after many years on the waterways. Hire boaters are normally much more careful.

I'm not sure there is any ready answer unless you encourage boaters to "shop" others, with real sanctions for repeat offenders, like license suspension.

I don't think you have the staff numbers to police this yourselves.

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Two initial points relating to the speed of passing moored boats

1. "What is slow enough" is subjective and there will be as many different opinions as there are boaters. It would be helpful to have a specific direction that all boaters could know whether they are going too fast or not.

2. "Tickover" is a worthless concept. I presume that this means that the engine gear is disengaged. What is important is the speed not what the engine is doing. You can pass a moored boat with your engine disengaged but if you are already going "slow enough" you could lose steerage way, and if you are going "too fast" then it will take more than a boat's length to slow down.

So here is my suggestion and it works! (No one has ever complained that I have passed their boat travelling too fast.)

It is worked on the premise that 2 miles per hour (i.e. "half" the legal top speed of 4mph) is an acceptable speed, being a slowish walking speed.

Do the maths if you are interested: at 2mph you cover 60 feet in 20 seconds.

Here is what to do.

1. Slow down at least 3 boat lengths before you start to pass the boat (yes, "tickover" will cause you to lose speed which you need to do before you get there)

2. Wherever you are standing on your boat, the instant that you are alongside one end of the moored boat you start counting in seconds (remembering to start at 0 of course).

If the moored boat is 60' you should get to 20 before you pass the other end of the boat.

This is a rough and ready rule and in particular not every boat is 60' long so for instance you will pass a 50' boat in 17 seconds and a 70' boat in 23 seconds.

Practice it! It won't take too long for anyone to be reasonably accurate in counting 20 seconds. It then won't take too long to get the feel of what speed will result in a count of 20 seconds so it won't take too long before you are used to it and won't have to slavishly count every time you pass a moored boat. You will also learn how many boat's length is required for your particular boat to slow to the appropriate speed.

If everyone adopted this principle then. no one should ever complain again!

I call it the [name redacted for anonymity] 20 second rule.

May I take the opportunity also to raise another issue which bugs me and this concerns the use of the horn. The issue has been raised in "waterways World" and there have been plenty of responses from boaters who "po po" the internationally recognised standards of making sounds. In my experience of boating at sea it is illegal to use the horn as a signal incorrectly, so I do not understand why canal boaters do not willingly adopt the principle. If someone did make the incorrect signal, and an accident took place in which some one received personal injuries I wonder if they could be sued or at the very least be made responsible.

The principle is:

1 hoot - "I am turning to starboard"

2 hoots - "I am turning to port"

3 hoots - "I have my engine in reverse gear" (That does not mean of course that the boat is going astern, merely that forward motion is being stopped.)

It is so easy to apply and accidents can be prevented if everyone applied the rules so we all know what was meant. Currently we do not; on the contrary we have no idea what it means.

An example from my own experience from last year.

I was passing an entrance to a marina when a wide beam came out into the canal. The helmsman hooted three times. It was therefore entirely reasonable for me to assume that he had seen me and was in the process of stopping to let me pass. But I was wrong, because 3 hoots on this occasion did not mean that his engine was in reverse gear, but instead it meant "get out of my way". He ploughed forward and turned right, right across my path and only quick reactions from me prevented a collision. Although I did slow down I was not expecting this to happen and it seemed as if he had not even seen me. Certainly there was no acknowledgement of my presence or an apology. Had he hooted once then of course I would have taken the appropriate action, knowing what his intentions were.

So everyone should be acquainted with this rule, but instead it seems that many boaters actually (deliberately?) ignore it and the consequence is that no one knows what anyone is doing.

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I do think that there is a great need for this debate and an acceptance that one size does not fit all cases.

The first one is the use of the term "wake". This term is IMO confusing and covers at least 2 different effects.

The first is the classic wake that ships make when travelling through water and takes the form of a delta shaped bow wave. Its shape is very variable depending on hull shape (the most horrific wake that I've ever seen was caused by a Los Angeles class submarine doing 20 knots on the surface... 10 ft high triangular wave with a vertical front edge!). The height is largely determined by the speed of the boat. In practice the bow wave of a canal boat is usually minimal due to both hull shape and low speeds. Even at say 6mph on a river the bow wave isn't usually over 6 or 8 inches for most boats and at 3-4mph usual canal speeds it will barely affect another 10 to 20 ton narrow boat. Of course, plastic cruisers are much more affected by this effect and deserve more consideration...



The second effect is far more of a problem and that is water flow around a boat caused by displaced water. This displacement effect is usually FAR more of a problem than the bow wave. The factors affecting this displacement effect are the cross sectional area of the canal and the boat. The problem is that the effect is massively different on different bits of canals. The amount of water displaced is fixed for a given boat and speed. On a shallow narrow canal, a narrow boat will take up a very large percentage of the canal's cross section and so all of the water displaced needs to get past the boat in a relatively small amount of space. So you get very fast waterflow past the boat which means that any moored boat gets pushed around a LOT which is unpleasant for occupants, potentially damaging to the moored boat and very likely to rip out mooring pins etc. Conversely on a wide and deep canal passing at a higher speed is far less likely to cause a problem.

So some suggested thoughts

- 1) You do not always need to slow down to tick over BUT sometime even tick over is almost too fast
- 2) Know the draft of your boat. The deeper the draft the more you will need to slow down
- 3) Take note of the canal cross section. You will need to slow down much more on narrow/shallow canals than deep/wider ones
- 4) Watch what happens as you pass a moored boat. If the boat stays pretty well stationary then you've got it right. If the boat moves back and forward noticeably then you are probably going a bit too fast. You cant do much to stop it at this stage but slow down a bit more for the next one! If the boat moves a lot then you really need to slow down lot!
- 5) Treat lightweight plastic/wood cruisers with extra care their light weight makes them move much easier and they aren't as robust as steel hulls.

Whilst mentioning this some comments on how folks moor to minimise the problems are worth adding as often the problem is caused by both the passing boat being too fast and the moored boat being very sloppily moored.

- 1) Whilst mooring up too tightly can be a problem but loose moorings are a really bad idea where other boats will be passing.
- 2) Use decent rope. Far too many boats use really thin ropes which stretch far too easily. Climbing rope is a really bad idea as it is designed to stretch a LOT.
- 3) Ideally do not moor up with your lines at right angles to the boat unless on a solid floating pontoon with rings/cleats.
- 4) Similarly long shallow angled moorings tend to exacerbate the problems of passing boats
- 5) Usually around 45 to 30 degrees forward and backwards works best allowing a reasonably tight line with enough flexibility to accommodate a reasonable degree of water level change.
- 6) Consider using one or moor "springs" (relatively shallow angle extra mooring lines running the opposite direction to your main mooring) which give a lot more resilience to effects of passing boats



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- 7) Don't use your centre line from the top of the cabin roof to a centre mooring. If someone comes past too fast you will induce a really unpleasant rocking motion. Centre lines are great but get a fixing/mooring point at deck level and use that not the roof fitting.
- 8) Make sure your mooring point is solid. If you can't use a ring or "nappy pin/chain on an Arco etc then use double pins at an angle to each other to make them more difficult to pull out, I see far too many boats with what looks like washing line wrapped round a really small sapling... What do they really expect will happen?

Finally a thought for folks putting up signs about moored boats....

Which of the following do you suppose gets the best response

"Please slow down, Moored boats"

Or

"SLOW DOWN!"

I have seen a few really insulting signs and sometimes even feel an urge to speed up.....

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Regarding your recent piece on cruising at an appropriate speed, one aspect has bugged me for years.

The oft-used phrase is to pass moored boats at 'tickover'. But this is a nonsense - at tickover, a boat's engine disengages the drive and the boat is merely drifting. I'm sure that newcomers and hirers in particular are thoroughly confused by the misused term.

Surely far better to suggest an actual speed or a catchphrase something like "Boats to pass? Cut the gas"

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I've been living on the canal network for 8 years and have been a boater for very much longer.

Boats travelling at inappropriate speed, particularly when passing moored boats have slightly increased in the last 8 years. There are, however, other contributory factors which exacerbate the effects on moored boats:

1. There are so many boats moored using their centre line in addition to bow and stern lines. Common sense says this is a bad idea as a line attached high on the boat will exaggerate any movement.
2. Boats moored with slack lines bounce around more than those moored on reasonably tight lines.
3. Mooring with the bow line secured ahead and stern line secured astern of the boat will help reduce movement.
4. It's very rare to see boats moored with springs in addition to bow and stern lines which is a sensible measure particularly where there might be plenty of boats moving.

It seems to me that, without denying that some passing boaters are inconsiderate, people could take more care in mooring to minimise disturbance. Perhaps there's a need for some educational assistance for the many inexperienced boaters who have been welcomed to the network. I try to help people out when they are having problems but all too frequently my offers of assistance are responded to with abuse.

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Soap Box out and I'm climbing onto it!

Stand by for lift off...

I'm on the Lancaster Canal, which as mentioned all over...

"is a shallow canal"

this means that speeding boaters cause a great deal of wash and turbulence...damaging banks and upsetting boaters.

Now then, 1stly let's address narrowboats, especially those crossing the Ribble Link from the main network...maybe they do or maybe they don't realise that they need to slow down on The Lanky, especially passing moored boats due to the shallowness.

Maybe they just don't care?

But maybe when they are booking passage across to The Lancaster they need to be educated in advance on how they should behave until they return to the main network. Just a footnote added to a booking email confirmation asking them to "slow it down a bit"

BUT.. locals on the Lancaster are also guilty both narrowboats and GRP's

Yes, GRP's... this is my real "BUG BEAR"

Why do they think they can just go hell for leather each time they sail? They rarely slow down past moored boats if at all... in a crash situation they would come off worse compared to narrowboats, so why are they so brave or is it just stupidity?

Do they think they are still driving a car as they are sat in front of a steering wheel?

They REALLY need to be educated, seriously educated in speed awareness!!

Some hire companies also need to be brought to task on letting their customers know about speed awareness too.. once let loose they can be a nightmare, whereas others are exemplary... so it can be done and is done...

Right, I think I've ear bashed you beyond what is acceptable Damian so please please forgive me..

A footnote to my rant...

I've noticed that if you are sat outside on deck, boats slow down when they spot you..

I'm not wanting to deduce what this could mean???

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The majority of speeders are novices on hire boats, borrowed boats or new boaters etc.

As you are aware you need NO licence or even compulsory basic training (C.B.T.) to operate an inland boat.

Percentage of speeders (just a personal view after boating extensively all around the system for 25 years).

1 . Novices - Hire boats either commercial or borrowed or new boaters 80%

2. Inconsiderate boaters and those under the influence 10%

3. Unavoidable speeders 10% \*

Reason for unavoidable speeding (3)\*

Medical emergency

Urgent family emergency at home etc

Weather conditions high winds etc

Navigating past a weir stream etc

Trying to get through a potential stoppage

Trying to get through a restricted opening location

Moments of forgetfulness

Frustration with continuously moored boats K & A!

Avoiding a collision with an oncoming boat

On river navigations going down stream (you have to go faster than the stream to maintain control)

We are guilty of speeding past boats for some of the reasons stated above. The vast majority of the time we try to be considerate boaters. However we still get shouted at by boats that rarely navigate and have no clue how to moor when we are coasting past as less than tickover! Speeding is subjective and some boats just like to shout at you and moan and indeed some don't believe boats should move!

We have lost count of the number of incidents with novice hire boaters we have witnessed or have been made aware of over the years.

Several have been fatal with a lady falling off her hire boat on the Oxford Canal and a novice boater opening his side hatch going through a bridge hole.

We are always amazed that more accidents do not happen, this may be due to technology, You Tube videos and better introductions at hire bases.

On our first trip this year a hire boat struck a lift bridge, knocking it from its hinges (bridge 183 Oxford canal 30/04/2024). The bridge is on a straight approach and very easy to navigate under compared to most of the lift bridges on the Oxford Canal. Hopefully the hydraulic conversions will help.





On the other hand on our first trip we met up with 3 guys that regularly hire boats and are probably the best boaters we have ever met. We last encountered them on the K&A in 2019 and spent all day moving from Hungerford to Honey street, a very enjoyable journey for both parties which neither of us will ever forget!

C.B.T is needed if we want to improve the standard of considerate boating. Let alone reduce the risk of serious injuries, fatalities, sinkings, collisions, speeding etc.

Please see below CBT for motorcycles

<sup>2</sup>It was introduced in [Great Britain](#) on 1 December 1990 as a means of reducing accidents on the road caused by inexperienced drivers by reviewing aspects of riding both on and off the road with a qualified motorcycle instructor registered with an Approved Training Body (ATB).

Shortly after this was introduced the volume of accidents greatly reduced.

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