

Feedback to mooring article written by Nick Roberts and published in Boaters' Update on [4 December 2015](#)

I can't argue with the mooring techniques Nick discusses, except to say that if you have to moor on pins it's simply not always possible to make them secure enough to hold against a passing boat, due to the bank conditions.

What I would argue with is the use of the word 'backwash'. It suggests that if your prop doesn't appear to be causing much turbulence, you're not going to disturb moored boats much. I used to believe that. Until I did the IWHC helmsman course.

The instructor pointed out what should have been obvious if I had thought about it - what moves the moored boats isn't the backwash - it's the fact that my boat - about 18 tons of it, displaces 18 tons of water as it passes. In other words, it shoves 9 tons of water to either side as it passes, and if it passes fast, it can lift a moored boat, and lift the pins out of soft ground, with unstoppable force.

A mathematician might be able to work out how many tons per second that is at different speeds. Slowing down means that the extra water will have the chance to flow more easily around that stationary boat, and not lift it so violently. The shallower the water, the less there is under the moored boat, and the closer the passing boat is, the more difference the extra 9 tons of water will make as it thrusts by.

But if people look at their 'backwash' to decide whether their speed is polite, they'll often be wrong. And going to tickover - even going into neutral - will make no difference unless you do it soon enough for the boat actually to be travelling slower by the time it passes, since it will still be displacing its weight in water, even if the propeller isn't turning. Just saying.

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I entirely agree with the author of the article entitled Oi! Slow Down. The key is mooring properly with lines lead well forward & well aft plus ideally "springs" (i.e. a line from bow to a fixed point on the bank near the stern & a line from the stern to a fixed point on the bank near the bow). Then if you wish, breast lines to hold her in.

Instead you see people with a tight line from the middle ring on the roof to the bank at 90 degrees to the boat which has the effect of ensuring the boat heels & then snatches uncomfortably with the slightest movement, together with bow & stern lines lead at 90 degrees to the bank. These do nothing to resist the longitudinal movement as a boat passes but ensure that there is maximum strain on pegs and ropes.

In addition it is common to see people moored on the outside of bends, where the canal narrows & near bridge holes - all places to avoid and places that will exaggerate the effect of a passing boat, as well as at best inconveniencing other boaters.

The canals are primarily for navigation, mooring is a secondary activity & must be done intelligently. If not the moorer will always suffer even if they try to blame someone else.

It would be good to see the Trust and Trust contractors demonstrating good practice rather than what we usually see which is appalling - inadequate lines, tied with no intelligence & little consideration.

Perhaps Trust moorings could display diagrams showing the proper technique?

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We have an aluminium Sea Otter, which as it is relatively light at 4.5 tons, gets thrown about by larger boats steaming past. In the early days of our ownership often the pins would pull out and we even came back once to find it adrift. All was solved by the use of rond anchors and springing either end, see attached photograph. With pins we found they bent over in soft banks and then just pulled out, rond anchors just dig in more as they are pulled.

The centre line, when attached to the roof of a boat is not a mooring rope, as it only ensures to tip the boat over sideways as other boats pass. It can be used as a breast line if attached to the top of the gunwhale, as there is less tendency to pull the boat over. The centre rope is really meant for handling the boat whilst cruising and negotiating locks etc., in fact some hire fleets at one time didn't provide a centre line to avoid problems



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I agree with Nick but it would have been better if a picture of a boat correctly moored was included as his explanation isn't always understood by everyone, especially new boaters.

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I am in complete agreement with Nick's comments but surely mooring securely is just common sense?

If we all adopted the principle that only you are responsible for your boat, not the person at the helm of that passing vessel and act accordingly, then the risk of your boat being chucked around all over the place would be significantly reduced if not eliminated.

There are some circumstances, such as cruising in a gusting wind, where it is absolutely vital to maintain a degree of speed or otherwise run the risk of losing steerage.

Under such circumstances there's little to be gained by yelling at someone for failing to slow down and further to that, if someone doesn't know how to spring their boat, might I suggest that they think about enrolling on an RYA Helmsman's Course?

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I completely agree with Nick Roberts. There may be times when tick-over is appropriate, e.g. passing a boat tied to temporary mooring pins in a wet and soft bank, or even coasting past out of gear when a boat has just stopped and is being held by one crew member whilst another sorts out the moorings.

However, when boats are tied up on their home moorings, it is reasonable to expect them to be adequately moored (and fendered) to cope with others passing at a sensible speed.

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Nick Roberts' short piece has given me food for thought.

I think Nick (brave!) may have something. Perhaps we all need to think a bit more before shouting out "Slow Down": we, and not the passing boat, may be the problem.....

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Until reading Nick's thoughts, I'd only ever thought of using springs on tidal waterways, but - from next season - I will start using springs whenever I tie up for the day. After all, if we're honest, we know that in shallow waters make most moored boats swing, even when the passing boat is dribbling along.

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By having two ropes from the stern dolly to the bank, both at about 45 degrees to the keel of the boat, this prevents forward or backward movement, while the rope at the front keeps me into the bank.

Since using this system of mooring up I have never had a pin pulled out (even though others around me have) and have rarely experienced movement of my boat however fast boats pass me.

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Nick is absolutely right of course. He may have forgotten to mention the use of the line from the centre of the roof that is shown on the photo. This is designed for easier boat management at locks and the initial stages of mooring up.

However carefully one lays out springs and slackless bow and stern ropes, when a boat passes and the water level rises and falls, the centre rope causes the moored boat to list quite noticeably and may well contribute a major part of the feeling that someone is speeding.

This rope is often anchored to a spike in the bank and, because of the steep angle the rope takes up, any listing the boat makes simply plucks it out like a rotten tooth, so it adds nothing to the security of one's mooring. It can even negatively affect one's safety in places where water level changes may occur.

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This was in response to a claim made by someone in BU in 2014 that moored boats should only be passed at tick over – it was re-sent as it perfectly chimed with Nick's article:

Not quite! As a responsible boater I do, of course, always slow down for moored boats but very rarely to 'tick over'. Tick over on my boat gives me between 0.2 and 0.5 mph. At that speed I have little or no steerage way and it would take me between one and two hours to pass a half-mile string of permanent moorings! Maybe I'm being too literal here, but I don't find the term 'tick over' to be either helpful or realistic: something better is required.

I noticed this year when traversing the Leeds and Liverpool Canal that the 'official' Trust warning notices in the approach to moorings all say 'Slow. Moored Boats. 2 mph'. That is more realistic, but it too is a generalisation. What is important is to slow down to such a speed that our boat is not making any wash or causing excessive drag (flow of water).

Many factors influence that, most noticeably the depth and width of the waterway. What would go unnoticed on a wide, deep section of the Trent or Thames would cause mayhem on the Ashby Canal. It is also important to take note of the type of mooring being passed: boats on staked moorings should be passed with particular care.

Finally, let us not forget that this is a two-way process. When we moor up we have a responsibility to ensure that we do so with care and in such a way as to reduce potential problems from passing boats.

The Boaters' Handbook gives clear guidance on setting 'springs' in addition to fore and aft mooring lines to ensure that our boat remains in a fixed position relative to the land when other boats pass. How many inland boat owners do this, even on permanent moorings? Mooring a boat with just a single, loosely-tied rope at each end will inevitably result in it moving every time another boat passes, not matter how slowly it does so.

Courtesy and consideration when we pass other boats is a must, but it needs to be combined with care and responsibility when we tie up. If we all took this two-fold approach this particular problem would become history.

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Fully agree that adequate mooring is the main issue. After all this is what you have control of. Next time you think a passing boat is causing you some grief. Check your moorings first. Must say I get frustrated when I am expected to be at tick over for extended lengths of the canals.
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I agree with Nick very much. I always slow well down when passing moored boats but tick-over on my boat is so slow that steering safely in any kind of breeze is hazardous to say the least. Plus the fact that on many canals there are long lines of moored boats every mile or so down the length of the canal and tick-over speed being less than half a mile per hour results in a very boring passage.

I have a linear mooring with six ropes keeping the boat steady, fore and aft at 45 degrees, chain straight out at each end and fore and aft springs. Very few boats slow down to tick-over but my boat moves very little because it is well moored.

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The man is absolutely right, but I'm not sure how you actually get people to moor their craft properly. I guess publicity would help though. Obviously a lot of mooring places are against land that is soft, and it is much more difficult to put in mooring stakes that will stay in position. There are however various versions of spiral 'land anchors' that are far more effective in such soft ground. It might help if they were more commonly known.

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Great to see the article on how to moor a boat properly... long overdue... the onus should not be entirely on the passing boat to slow down, both moored and moving boats need to do their bit.

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No I do not agree with Nick. What happens when you are moored where the bank is soft... He seems to think there are rings and bollards everywhere... Tick over past moored craft... Simple!

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Mostly agree but the problem comes from the 'Slow down when passing moored boats' that is too late, it should read 'Slow down **before** passing moored boats'. Personally I always slow down at least two full length boat (72' X2) lengths, before passing.

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Spot on!

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I thoroughly agree with Nick's observations. It therefore follows that if a skipper spots a boat being held on its ropes by the crew, either mooring up or setting off, then they **MUST** slow down.

This situation is the worst case scenario and a passing boat can easily rip the line out of a person's hand causing burns and other injuries. So it is up to both crews to be aware of what can happen and to take appropriate actions.

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Thank you, and thank Nick Roberts for his excellent article "Oi! Slow Down!" in the last Boaters' Update. I've always believed that every argument has two sides and most have three - so, over this issue, it was great to hear the other point of view. I think that between you, you two have done boating a great service - keep up the good work.