

# CAPT'N KEVO'S

## Boating Tips



### Training Westmar

It was foggy and cold out when I woke up that morning... Quite a difference from the day before when we had sunshine and temps in the 70s! I'd spent the previous night getting ready to instruct nine people on our vessel, *Her Way*.

It was eerily quiet – kind of like the calm before the storm. What was I thinking? How am I supposed to teach this many people how to operate a twin-screw, diesel-powered vessel in a few hours? This required a “plan” – sort of like a “Float Plan.”

By the way, if you are going on

a serious cruise, by all means file a float plan with someone you know. You can find float plans easily on the web.

But I digress... Now mind you, these weren't just any old clients. They were “the gang” from Westmar Marine Insurance Services, which is based in Stockton, CA.

Underwriters, customer service representatives and management were all represented in the group. The goal was to give these folks an idea of what it was like to drive a twin-screw yacht.

Why, you ask? Well, these people

are the ones who deal with all aspects of boating insurance in the company. Having actual experience on the water would add to their overall knowledge of boating and help them “relate” to the boating public, making them more proficient at their respective positions.

Well, no sense teaching on an empty stomach, so I headed out on foot to Korth's for some breakfast at 7 a.m. But they don't open until



From left, Jim LaRondelle, first mate; Kevo; Paul Gangi, customer service; Sheri Garner, New Business Team Leader; Dawna Meyer, underwriter; Katie Roberson, customer service; Stacie Cummings, underwriter; Beulah Coleman, underwriter; Maria Lawrence, underwriter; Kathy Kennedy, Renewal/Service Team Leader; and Margaret Christman, customer service.



Beulah Coleman, underwriter for Westmar, takes her turn at the helm of *Her Way*.

8 a.m. Darn... 50 minutes to go. OK, get the boat ready to go, make sure food and beverages are secure and accounted for. Most importantly, make sure all life jackets (PFDs) are accounted for and easily accessible.

I had promised nine people that I could train them AND provide a BBQ in the span of four hours (9 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Just when I thought I was going to have a panic attack, my good friend, first mate and chef du jour, Mr. Jim LaRondelle, shows up at the dock. His boat, *Kickin' Back*, is berthed just a few boats down from ours. (Notice how I didn't say "my" boat? I'm a mere shadow of the man I used to be.) HA!

He volunteered his time to giving me a hand managing this affair. Thanks Jim... I couldn't have done it without you! Where was I? Oh yeah – back to "the plan."

The plan was to work in "shifts" with four or five folks on the bridge for at least two progressive phases of training. Each student could observe the current trainee and hypothetically be that much more prepared when they got their chance at the helm. Each shift would go through



First mate Jim LaRondelle cooking up a great BBQ for our guests.

phase one before we proceeded to phase two. Phase one was what I refer to as "hand/mind coordination."

What we do is go out into the middle of a river or bay – in this case the Mokelumne River – and spin the boat around using only the engines and throttles. No steering with the helm. To most folks the cause and effect of why the boat does what it does is baffling at first.

As they are spinning the boat out in the middle where they know they can't hit anything, I explain why the boat is reacting the way it is and how to reverse or alter the rotation of the boat. I do this by telling my clients to imagine the boat as a clock. Pick a spot on land or a buoy and let's call that 12 o'clock.

Next I explain where 3, 6 and 9 o'clock would be relative to 12. Then we proceed to spin the boat and stop it on each of these four vectors. Each participant got to go around once clockwise and once counterclockwise for a total of eight stops and starts. The reason I do this exercise out in the middle of the river is that I don't want the clients' minds cluttered with anxiety about hitting something right off the bat. This way the fundamentals are more likely to sink in (excuse the pun) deeper. OK, no more puns! (Sorry, I couldn't resist.)

All of the nine trainees completed phase one successfully. Now it was time for phase two: take the boat into close quarters and duplicate what they had just learned in a real close-quarters situation.

I chose Korth's Pirate's Lair Marina for the second phase for two reasons. First, there is no current inside the breakwall of the entrance to the marina and, second, there is a nice semi-circular corral just off the gas docks with boats all around. This is where the rubber meets the road. They soon found out why we were practicing the same maneuvers in open water and how, by doing this first, their anxiety levels were reduced to manageable levels (for the most part).

Most twin-screw vessels will tend to "corkscrew" in a forward rotation while in a pivot configuration with minimal power applied to both screws. Left to its own devices in close quarters, the vessel will eventually crash into something if this phenomenon is not checked and corrected.

Why does this happen? For three reasons: first, (most) propellers are designed to "push" through the water not pull. The reverse screw has less power than the forward screw. Second, the contours of the vessel favor the pushing screw because the "pulling" screw encounters the resistance of the stern of the vessel, which is flat against the water, as opposed to the forward screw, which has "clean" contours leading up to the bow. Third, the propulsion is coming from the rear of the vessel and

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not from the “fulcrum point” farther forward. These three factors (in my opinion) are why twin-screw vessels tend to corkscrew forward.

So how do we correct this and spin the vessel in the length of the vessel, you ask? We do this by applying varying degrees of increased power to the reverse screw. This is why I always remind my clients to keep their hand on the reverse throttle while pivoting. Remember, the reverse throttle is different depending on whether the boat is spinning clockwise or counterclockwise.

So after three hours of rigorous training, we docked in front of the Riverboat restaurant and proceeded

to have a great BBQ. Everything went as planned and the gang disembarked before the 1 p.m. deadline. We did it!

### **Kevo's Tip:**

Enough with my professional secrets to teaching folks how to competently handle their vessels in close quarters!

Kudos to the management of Westmar for endorsing the idea of giving their valued employees the opportunity to see what it is like to handle a 38-foot, twin-screw beast in close quarters on company time. It demonstrated that they embrace the concept of employee self-improvement and empowerment.

Be safe & happy boating!

**As always, feedback is appreciated. I can be reached at [kevo@yachtsmanmagazine.com](mailto:kevo@yachtsmanmagazine.com) or 925/890-8428. ✍**