

Boating Tips

Stormy Cruise In

The weather forecast called for a major winter storm to start rolling in to NorCal on Friday and last throughout the weekend. Our club, the Sacramento Bayliner Club, was scheduled to cruise in to the Marina West Yacht Club (MWYC) at Tower Park in Lodi that weekend. It was St. Patrick's Day weekend. What to do? Should we cancel the cruise in? Not a chance!

We decided to head out a day early to beat the storm. This would also help in that my wife, Susan, AKA The Admiral, and I were one of three hosts for the festivities. Getting there early would alleviate the stress of getting one of these parties together at the last minute.

The other two host boats made

the same decision. On Thursday, March 17, we all met at the marina to coordinate our mission and agree upon a departure time. Little did we know we were heading into the worst winter storm of the season...

The trip from Riverboat Marina to Tower Park would take about an hour. The skies were clear and the winds light. I got out first and proceeded up the Mokelumne River toward the Mokelumne River Bridge at Hwy 12 in order to warm up our Hino 175-hp naturally aspirated diesels. Did you know it is better to warm up diesels underway with a little load on them as opposed to warming up at the dock with no load? Ours take 20 minutes to warm up and I gag at the smell of diesel, so this is a good thing!

The other two boats, one a



BY KEVIN O'LEARY

Carver Santiago 638 and the other a 40-foot Bluewater, both gas-powered, caught up to me just downriver of the bridge. Our club is mindful of the disruption multiple boats going through this bridge (separately) can cause to the traffic on Hwy 12, so we make it a point to coordinate our requests for opening with the travel plans of our members in order to maximize the number of boats utilizing just one opening, thus reducing the carbon footprint we leave on the environment. But I digress...

The trip was smooth and uneventful. We arrived safely at the yacht club dock and impressed the Port Captain, Mr. Ed Stetson, with our collective docking skills in a wicked downstream current. After lashing our boats down tight for the coming storm, we settled into the bar to meet our hosts from the Marina West Yacht Club, Jack and Mary Lee Michaels, and down a pint or two in honor of St. Patrick.

The next morning (Friday) our guests started arriving. The wind was howling and the rain falling, but most of the fleet tolerated the conditions and made their way safely to the club. Again, our members displayed their close-quarters maneuvering/docking skills to the Port Captain, Ed. (Taught 'em everything they know. HA!)



SBC Vice Commodore Jim LaRondelle rings the clubhouse bell and buys a round on SBC.

Friday night we dined on Jack's Famous BBQ Chicken at the club. Some of the (SBC) club members were texting a few other members who did not venture out because of the weather and "razzing" them for being "wussies." So, low and behold two of them show up (by boat) just as the bar closed at 11:30 p.m.! The Admiral and I were long in bed, but apparently she was one of the ones doing the "razzing" because one of the women on one of the boats came over and started pounding on our hull yelling for her to get up and party! Susan was having none of it. So ended Friday night...

By Saturday morning it was raining hard and the wind was really howling. A group of members went boat to boat and made sure they were tied fast to the dock. By now the docks were rocking and rolling, too. Most of us spent Saturday staying dry and waiting for the big St. Patrick's Day party scheduled for that night. Corned beef and cabbage for everybody!

At about noon on Saturday, the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary (USCGA) showed up to do our annual voluntary Vessel Safety Check (VSC). They inspected nine vessels (including ours) and all vessels passed. Remember: May is National Boating Safety Month and a great time to schedule a VSC from either the USCGA or the United States Power Squadron (USPS).

I remind clients all the time that a VSC is not just about having the necessary equipment onboard, but also about refreshing your memory as to where all this stuff is after the winter season so when you need it you know where it is.

The cocktails were flowing, the gift of gab was everywhere and the shamrocks were plentiful. Just before dinner, the club introduced their members and we proceeded



SBC members Mark and Judy Hudock return to the marina safely only to find their new pickup truck under a fallen tree.



Attendees show off their 2011 VSC stickers. From left in front row, Bill Correll, Carrie Van de Boom and Tony Leonardi of the USCGA.



MWYC Port Captain Ed Stetson and his wife Bonnie.

CAPT'N KEVO'S *Boating Tips*

to exchange burgees. They hang all the burgees from all the clubs that cruise in on the clubhouse walls. Since we are a "cruising club" and have no clubhouse, we're not sure where we are going to hang theirs.

After dinner, the party continued at the bar. Our Vice Commodore, Jim LaRondelle, rang the bell in the bar and bought everyone a drink on the club. By now, we were in the teeth of the storm.

Sunday morning brought little relief from the conditions. The MWYC served a great breakfast and we had our monthly meeting for the club. Then it was time to bestow the Chicken Award to the most deserving member.

This award is bestowed upon the (attending) member who commits the worst nautical faux pas of the weekend. This is a very useful tool for a number of reasons. First, it keeps everyone on their toes in terms of doing stupid things. This could actually save someone's life some day. Second, it winds up the weekend with a lot of hilarity; and, third, it teaches us all an important lesson... humility.

We were the first to leave on Sunday morning. The rain had slackened off, but the wind was still fierce as was the current. We decided to take the long way home through Little Potato/Potato Sloughs, because the wind was blowing and we thought the Mokelumne River Bridge would not be in operation as a result. I had a four-knot current on my stern and a 50-knot wind on my bow.

The boat was behaving sluggishly. At first I attributed it to the



Our MWYC hosts were Jack and Mary Lee Michaels.



The Admiral practices "creative fender placement."

conditions, but soon after leaving the harbor my ability to steer the boat started to deteriorate. It felt like I was trying to fly a plane without all the controls at my disposal. Now I was on Little Potato Slough with the tules and a 50-knot wind on my port beam and the rocks 50 feet off my starboard beam. Luckily, the current diminished a bit after we left the Tower Park marina.

I knew what the problem was

instinctively: little or no pressure in the hydraulic power-steering pressure/fluid reservoir. I got on the intercom and told The Admiral we had a serious problem. For a second the boat was on the verge of being out of control. The first thing I thought about was if I were an inexperienced mariner in this situation I might have panicked. (Not!)

I immediately throttled back and pivoted the boat into the wind

using the shifters and throttles. I had to muscle the boat around in a pivot with the throttles to get her to turn into this fearful wind. Susan sprang into action and retrieved the basketball pump from the stateroom closet, opened the lazarette on the starboard side and pumped up the pressure in the unit to 20 psi.

All this time I'm fighting a 50-knot wind in a narrow slough just trying to keep the boat off the rocks. We did it. I got the steering back, got back on course and headed back to port.

All of our club members made it back safely to port. However, one member returned to find a huge tree had fallen on his brand new Dodge pickup truck in the parking lot of Riverboat Marina. Ouch!

Kevo's Tip:

If your boat is equipped with a power-steering fluid/pressure reservoir, locate it, check it periodically; make sure you have the pump onboard to pump it up, know how to use it and where it is. Or else you'll have The Admiral to pay. Ouch... Stop it woman!

Be safe & happy boating!

As always, feedback is appreciated. I can be reached at 925/890-8428 or kevo@yachtsmanmagazine.com. *✉*



The Chicken Award passes from SBC members Courtney Guinn to Terry Counts.



SBC Commodore Terry Counts exchanges burgees with MWYC Commodore Ken Dretzka.

CAPTAIN KEVO'S

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