

## Boating Tips

### Shifters & Throttles

**W**e packed up the dogs (Uncle Bob and Murphy) and brought them over to Susan's sister's house to visit with her dog, Trigger, for the weekend. Then we both set out on missions to stock the boat for the weekend.

I took off on our new scooter, which gets 80 mpg, to one store while she motored in one of the pickup trucks to another store. Then we were off to the marina to meet our friends and head out for another adventure on the Delta.

We were scheduled to cruise in to the Stockton Yacht Club and having never been there before we were excited to get underway and enjoy the renowned hospitality of this club.

After many disorganized departures, my wife and I have settled on a departure procedure that works for us. I unload everything from the truck to the boat while she puts everything away between my trips. Hey, it works for us!

After going through our pre-departure checklist, which included checking the air pressure in the power steering unit, we embarked on our voyage to Stockton. No sooner had we left the marina using only throttles and shifters, I realized once again I had no steering. (Refer to last month's column.)

We immediately turned back to the marina only to encounter three or four of our fellow members

departing and wondering what the heck was going on with *Her Way*. After they all left we got the boat back into the slip and started troubleshooting the problem.

It seems that our previous problem with the air pressure in the power steering unit wasn't the (full) culprit after all. I noticed a line of red power steering fluid leaking slowly from the bridge helm. Having seen this problem on many vessels I've instructed on in the past, I knew what it was right away: a blown seal in the hydraulic steering unit at the bridge helm.

### What To Do?

Should we cancel the weekend and go home? Stay on the boat in the slip while all our friends enjoy the (fantastic) hospitality of the Stockton Yacht Club or try to figure out this problem and fix it so we can get underway? Do I have to tell you the answer?

Just then our fellow club member and close friend Sam calls and asks how we are doing. I said in my best New Yawk accent: "We're doin' great; how you doin'?" He is an experienced mechanic and knows everything you need to know about hydraulic systems. He says he'll be right over and help get us on our way in a jiffy.

After much debate and consultation with Wes Williams, manager of the Delta Boat Works, we decided the best course of action was to



disconnect the three hydraulic lines from the bridge helm and cap them off. This would allow me to pilot the boat from the downstairs station. (If you ever do this, make sure you mark the lines or you may be in for a very unpleasant surprise when you put the system back together and try to turn the vessel.)

After a trip to the Napa Auto Parts store in Rio Vista and a four-hour delay, we were finally on our way. Thanks Sam!

The trip was uneventful except for the fact that I was driving from the downstairs station. I'd never done that before. I was told when I bought the boat that this station was not of much use because as you go faster the bow rises and blocks out the horizon. This is definitely a no-no for tight confines of the Delta. Restricted visibility equals danger.

The helm performed as it should and we docked the boat in front of, Oh, I don't know... maybe a dozen folks at the Stockton Yacht Club wondering if I really knew how to drive/dock these things. Or they could have been looking for pointers. Your call. HA!

We were greeted by the Vice Commodore, Mr. Bob Cain, and the lovely Commodore of the Stockton Yacht Club, Ms. Jeanne Kopshever. She and the team of members made

sure we had a great time throughout our stay.

So low and behold I learn that my colleague, Mr. Bill Wells of the "Delta Rat Scrapbook" column, is in attendance. I walked down the dock to see him holding court with a bunch of SYC members on Saturday afternoon. Meanwhile, my wife Susan, The Admiral, took a dinghy toward Stockton and climbed up the levee in order to get a part from West Marine. I was impressed with her determination! She returned safely, part in hand with the dinghy owner, Sam.

To make a long story short regarding our stay at Stockton Yacht Club, suffice it to say they treated us very well and we will surely be back!

Now... Why am I writing this column again? Oh yeah: Shifters & Throttles.

### Heading Home

We were the second boat to leave. It started off simple enough: just drive the boat slowly with both shifters in forward from a stern tie, clear the boats to port and starboard and pivot counterclockwise 90 degrees to port and be on our way.

Next, (once again) I discovered we have no steering. It was easy going in a 5-mph mile zone down the river, but what to do when we reach the main channel? By this time I'd had some serious time at the helm using shifters and throttles only and figured what the heck, it could make for a good article. So we proceeded downriver on an outgoing tide toward our marina on the Mokelumne River.

Surprisingly all was going well. This was in direct relation to the fact that there were not that many vessels on the water on our route. Actually, the more I powered up the better control I had. By the time we got to Mandeville Cut I was feeling pretty good about our prospects for getting the boat back to port safely.

Mind you, I have Vessel Assist but chose not to use it based on my progress so far. For those of you who don't have Vessel Assist, I highly recommend it. It's the equivalent of AAA on the water. To find out more about Vessel Assist, go to [www.vesselassist.com](http://www.vesselassist.com).

Just downriver from Mandeville Cut near Washington Cut, the river gets wide, turns to the northeast and the wind/waves increase, sometimes dramatically due to the "fetch." I was still in control of the boat but things were becoming more challenging as we proceeded along our way.

Susan came up to the bridge to see how I was doing. (She had already prepared all three anchors onboard to be deployed just in case.) I told her: "Relax... you're with a professional." Yeah, THAT helped a lot. HA!

### One Of Those Feelings

So next, we are coming up on Potato Slough on our starboard side and I spot a flotilla of poweryachts heading from Potato Slough west toward Washington Cut. I said to Susan, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

Sure enough, the last boat, a 38-foot Bayliner just like ours, comes around a blind turn on my starboard side on a collision course. Susan, The Admiral, advises me that if we give way we run a huge risk of running the boat into the rocks on account of the wind and current. I responded that we must give way to this vessel as they are stand on to us.

She immediately agreed and ran down to man the anchors just in case. I throttled down, shifted her to reverse and started drifting into the rocks waiting for the other vessel to pass. Mind you, they have no idea what our helm situation is. Seconds tick by, then Susan yells, "Babe, I suggest you use your considerable knowledge of boat handling skills to get us out of this situation pronto!" (Well... That's what I recall she said anyway.)

The wind was howling; the boat was starting to gain speed and drifting ever closer to the rocks. I put the power on the port motor first in reverse to spin the bow into the wind and get my bow away from the rocks. The bow

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will always go with a wind of about 20 knots in little or no current. Then simultaneously I powered up the starboard motor to get my steering back. Well, if you want to call it that. It didn't work. I needed more power.

Susan looked up hopefully and I put more throttle on those babies than I've ever put on in a pivot situation. Finally she started coming around (the boat I mean). I can't imagine what the other skipper on the other 38 was thinking about our situation. Luckily, they could not see the name of the boat.

So we got out of THAT one OK... Next we entered the Mokelumne River and pivoted into the entrance to our marina, Riverboat Marina. We entered the marina on shifters and throttles as usual and I put that puppy to bed like no body's business.

So... What can we learn from this experience?

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

Driving a twin-screw vessel on the Delta with no steering requires extreme concentration and a lot of confidence in your ability to pilot the vessel under these circumstances. You could find yourself on the rocks or in a collision with another vessel in a heartbeat.

Unless you feel lucky, don't try this with your vessel. Drop a hook or two and call for a tow. I honestly felt that I could handle the situation successfully and actually learned a few things along the way!

Be safe & happy boating!

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