

Boating Tips

A Day Trip On The Delta

It was a beautiful day early in the fall and my wife Susan, the Admiral, suggested we take our boat out for a day trip. At that time we were berthed at Pittsburg Marina. So we decided to take a cruise down to the Mokelumne River on the Delta Loop. The trip took about one hour and twenty minutes, was beautiful and the seas were following. The wind was out of the northwest at 10 to 15 miles an hour.

We stopped and had a nice lunch at the Riverboat Restaurant and then decided to take the boat over to The Bedrooms in Potato Slough to anchor out for a few hours, take a swim and do some kayaking. We arrived at our favorite spot and proceeded with anchoring procedures. Our boat has a Muir Cougar windlass system with 200 feet of chain/line rode. I have found over the years that this particular system is as near bulletproof as you can get!

Well, for some reason our "bulletproof" windlass would not work. (We blew a 90-amp fuse, which costs \$100 and is not something you would normally carry onboard.) Do I sound defensive? The wind was picking up and we decided to just pack it in and head back to port. Anyone familiar with a 38-foot Bayliner knows you can't drive from the downstairs sta-

tion (where the fuel gauges are) at speed. The reason is that the bow flares up too high to see in most conditions.

So we started heading back down the San Joaquin River toward Antioch. Over a period of about 15 minutes the weather conditions changed dramatically. The wind picked up to 20-25 knots with gusts over 30 out of the northwest. The swells were about 3 feet and choppy. The tide was flooding at max. Ordinarily these conditions are not a problem for a 38 Bayliner. This is especially true with canvas and isinglass around the entire bridge, which our boat has.

Heavy spray was coming over the bridge. It was difficult to see. I was having a good time staying totally dry within the canvas as the seas roiled over the boat and I was impressed with the "manners" of the boat in these conditions. (Thanks for a great job on the canvas, Curt).

I ordered the Admiral to don her inflatable lifejacket. I did the same.

Things got worse... As we passed False River the direction of the wind began to change from our starboard breast to starboard beam. Again, ordinarily this would not be a problem for a 38-foot Bayliner.

Just Cruising Along

We had the boat serviced recently and filled the fuel tanks. She



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holds 304 gallons. The tanks were full a few outings ago; we cruised around the Delta for a couple of weekends having a wonderful time without much concern for our fuel consumption. Well, it turned out the mechanic who serviced the (3) diesel motors on the boat inadvertently shut off the port tank. So, for a few weeks we were running all three engines on one tank and were not really concerned because we have a basic understanding of how far we can go before having to fuel up.

So there we were cruising down the San Joaquin River doing just fine considering the conditions at about 14 knots. Just after the intersection of False River and the San Joaquin River the commercial shipping channel veers directly alongside the south edge of the river. So basically, you've got low water to starboard and rocks to port. Very tight! Remember, the wind is on my starboard beam and is blowing like a son of a (boater). The tide was pushing us hard into the levee.

All of a sudden, the port motor just goes woof and stops with no warning. Susan was at my side and before we knew it the starboard motor made the same sound and stopped. It took us a "New Yawk minute" to realize we were out of fuel and going to be pushed into the

rocks. Estimated time to impact: 120 seconds. I'm talking running "hard" aground; in other words, hull damage, strut/shaft/prop damage. We looked at each other and without even saying a word, sprung into action...

Time For Action

We both slid down the ladder from the bridge and started our emergency anchoring procedures. Time to impact is now 105 seconds. Susan started getting the auxiliary anchor ready to deploy. She hurled that sucker over like a female Russian Olympic shot-putter! This was important because if this was our only chance, the scope had to be very long because the auxiliary anchor is not rated to hold the boat in these conditions, nor should it be.

I headed to the bow and opened

the anchor locker where the clutch release tool is for the windlass. Did you know windlasses have a release mechanism that will drop the anchor by gravity? But it doesn't mean a thing if you don't have the tool at hand. The point is, locate that tool and keep it where it can be accessed rapidly. I grabbed the tool, released the anchor and rode. Both dropped like a stone into about 35 feet of water.

We both looked at each other hoping for the best. The rocks were coming up fast and the waves were getting larger as we got closer. Time to impact is now 20 seconds. She gave a tremendous yank on the rode and screamed... "I got it!" I kept feeding out the main knowing that we only had one chance to stop this beast. I caught it with a 2 to 1 scope just 15 feet from the rocks.

HOLY SMOKES! That was way

too close. The Admiral assessed the situation and adjusted the auxiliary anchor accordingly. WE DID IT! The anchors stuck at the same time 15 feet from the rocks. We still had a horrendous wind on our starboard bow. I called Vessel Assist on channel 16 and they responded with haste.

Kevo's Tip:

Navigating Nor Cal waters can be very dangerous. Make sure all of your ground tackle is in good working order and accessible. Wear your lifejackets, especially in emergency situations.

Be safe & happy boating!

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