

Boating Tips

Fuel Management



BY KEVIN O'LEARY

Well, I'll bet I've got your attention with that title! Fuel prices are going through the roof! (Old news, Sherlock!) Vessels like ours (38-foot Bayliner) hold 300 gallons of diesel. At five bucks a gallon (maybe a deal by the time this publishes) that comes out to \$1,500 to fill the tanks! **Whoa, Datz a lotta cabbage!** (As we say in New Yawk.)

So, I set out on a mission. As those who know me personally will attest, I not only "talk the talk," I "walk the walk" meaning I (we), sorry Babe, own a boat and use it as often as possible.

I have a "lead foot," meaning I push our vessel at 90 percent of capacity for the power plants. In my case, I have Hino naturally aspirated diesels. Each motor is 175 hp with a six-cylinder in-line configuration. I usually run them at 2500 rpm and, depending on current and wind, get 16 to 19 mph while burning 10 gallons of fuel total per hour. While this is exceptional efficiency by yachting standards, it's still a challenge to use the boat as much as we used to when fuel prices were half what they are now.

So, I thought it would be interesting to see if I could change my driving habits and bring the cost of operating our vessel out of the stratosphere. My plan was to go from our home berth in Pittsburg to an anchorage deep in The Meadows. I had a few days off in June as the general recreational boating public was looking like a "deer in the headlights" as gas prices seemed to be going up by the hour. I joked to a boat broker in June that boat deals are going to start falling apart because the fuel tank isn't full! HA!

So I topped off both (fuel) tanks and left the marina on Thursday, June 19, with both motors on. As soon as I passed the breakwater I shut down my starboard motor. The tide was flooding just right and after warming up the motor I pushed it to 2000 rpm. With a push from the incoming tide I was making way at 10 mph. (A GPS can be set for knots or mph. I prefer mph.) With both motors running at 2500 rpm, I would do probably 16 to 19 mph so the 10 mph I was achieving was a significant increase in efficiency. (Remember the tide!)

The boat hummed along New York slough and then under the Antioch Bridge. I thought to myself... Huh, I've never gone underneath this bridge at this speed before. It was interesting to examine the structure and not

be so focused on not hitting a pier! In fact, I found it quite interesting and very beautiful going slower on the Delta... What a surprise! When you're pushing 18 tons through the water at speed you don't get to take in the scenery.

The first leg of this trip was from Pittsburg to Moore's Riverboat restaurant on the Mokelumne River. The distance was 21 miles and it took me 2.5 hours. (Warm up time and 5 mph areas included.) I tied up the boat and launched our dinghy (*The Highway*). Then went up and had a nice lunch at the restaurant. The rest of the day was spent dinghying around Korth's Pirate's Lair, Riverboat Marina and Willow Berm seeking out the many friends/clients we have berthing there. It didn't take long to find some buddies to party with and have dinner (and a few cold beers!).

I started on the second leg of the journey on Friday morning. I headed up the Mokelumne River running both motors at 1200 rpm. I decided to use both motors for this leg because there are winding, narrow curves on the river and lots of (fast) traffic in this area and I wanted the most maneuverability

as possible. Next stop was Walnut Grove Marina. My wife Susan (The Admiral) drove by car and met me there.

So, while I was waiting for the wife (she was on “wife” time), I stopped in at the Harbor Master’s office to say hello and inquire about purchasing fuel. When the guy saw our boat he thought he was in for a big sale. He hustled down to the boat all excited about selling 200-plus gallons of gas.

He handed me the nozzle and said: “pump away!” When I said she runs on diesel he looked puzzled. He said: “But we don’t sell diesel.” I said I wanted gas for the dinghy, not the big one. I took on 1.6 gallons! He was not impressed. In fact, when I told him a bunch of my friends would be coming up with their dinghies as

well that weekend, he instructed me to tell them not to come there to fill their dinghies. HA!

We arrived at our destination around 1 p.m. This is when the “fun” starts. Meaning this is when Susan and I have to work as a team to secure the boat to a tree as well as a very secure rear anchor because we had other boats coming to raft up next to us. After the usual confusion and “bickering,” we got her secured and sat back and laughed with a cold drink at how we (like many boating couples) get frustrated sometimes in these circumstances.

The trip back was pretty much the same as the way there. I rode the tide and used the other motor all the way back to Pittsburg. After a number of trips on one motor recently, I’ve realized you

sometimes need to “put the pedal to the metal” and get home. However, there are times when a little planning can save you some \$\$\$ on fuel.

Kevo’s Tip:

Well folks, at the end of the trip I stopped back at the fuel dock and filled both tanks again. So how much diesel did I consume to push 18 tons of boat 80 miles? 32 gallons. I kid you not! I cost me \$187. So, the sky is not falling and we can still enjoy boating. We just need to adapt and be more creative about how we use our vessels. Now get back out there and enjoy your boat. That’s an order! HA!

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