



Chesapeake Tartan 30 Association

RAFTING UP THE FLEET

The following article was originally published in The Mainsheet, the newsletter of the Alberg 30 association. It was reprinted in the April 1975 issue of The Hook, then in the Tartan 30 Manual (1981), and again in The Hook in July 1993. Whether you are new at rafting up sailboats or an old hand at it, the wisdom in this article is worth reviewing periodically.

One of the most pleasurable moments in cruising comes when the fleet rafts up to enjoy cocktails, rerun the race and perhaps spend the night.

All too often however, these pleasant moments are followed by dragging anchors, broken lines, crushed rails, and even shattered rigging. It seems very simple to make a raft of two boats — but when the entire fleet rafts up on the first boat, that's another story. The cocktail flag is often the signal for a line squall or a flock of water skiers. So let's consider how a raft can be built to add to the pleasure of the cruise.

The first boat in sets his anchor so as to allow more than usual swing and much more than usual scope. A raft of five boats is more than five times as strong as one boat. So allow 12:1 scope minimum and set the biggest anchor hard. The skipper of this boat is the raft captain. No boat should join the raft until he has asked for and obtained permission from the raft captain. The anchor boat puts out fenders on both sides.

When you have obtained permission to come alongside, you will also be told whether to tie up to port or starboard. The idea is to keep the raft reasonably balanced. A one-sided raft has greater windage and, if there is a current, much greater anchor strain than a balanced raft.

Come alongside slowly, aiming your bow just forward of his shrouds and fending between the boats. Put your bow line aboard the other boat and have it made fast to his bitt and run properly through his bow chock. You can then adjust the length of this line yourself to line up properly. Stop your boat with a short reverse thrust and cut the engine.

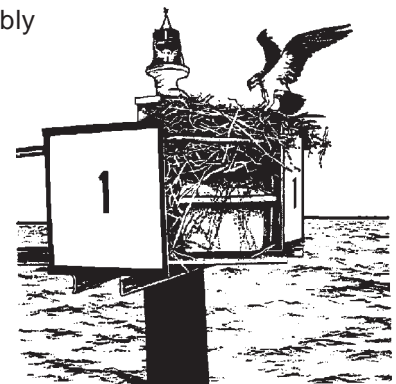
Pass your stern line and have it cleated down and properly chocked. Adjust bow and stern lines until you lie along his fenders parallel to him, with your spreaders at least two feet astern of his. Run a stern spring line from your stern cleat, through the chock, between the two boats to his bow chock and to his bow cleat. Lead it past his fenders and adjust the length to hold you parallel and astern of him. Lead a bow spring from your forward bitts through the bow chock outside the lifelines of both boats to his stern chock and bitts. Adjust this line to have reasonable tension so you will not ride forward on him and to take the strain off the stern line. Note that all lines are outboard except for the bitted ends. The outboard boat provides fenders for the next arrival.

When spring lines are too short (as they usually are) they can be attached to stanchions and winches. The longer the spring, the safer the raft, and springs attached as described do not present a tripping hazard for the guest who is not familiar with rafts.

As the party progresses, it seems someone always wants to leave the raft and it is never the guy on the end, because he just got there. It is easy to leave a raft without disturbing a lot of boats if it is done properly.

A raft that is properly built will have tight bow lines and loose stern lines. This indicates that first attention must be given to the bow. The boat leaving always backs out of his place in the raft. Really, he drifts astern. Make certain that both the inboard and outboard boats are manned. First pass a new bow line between the boats on either side. Take it forward of everything and clear of the boat that is leaving. Snug it up tight.

1. Cast off your (the inboard of the raft) stern line and take it aboard.
2. Cast off the outboard stern line (his) and let him take it aboard.



3. Cast off the inboard forward spring (yours) and take it aboard.
4. Cast off the outboard forward spring (his) and let him take it aboard.

At this point you are hanging on the bow lines and the after springs. Check to see which ones of these are slack and which are taut. Slack lines may be cast off and taken aboard (the owner's boat).

Allow your boat to move aft, fending forward of the shrouds if necessary as the bows of the other two boats come together. The outboard boat will move into the spot you have vacated, hanging on the new bow lines. As soon as your bow is clear, he should rig his after spring and take in the bow line until he is properly positioned, parallel to and with clearance between the spreaders. You are meanwhile drifting back until you are clear of the raft and free to maneuver.

Rafts which are properly made are more maneuverable than single boats. Snug down the springs and follow the raft captain's orders. On the Chesapeake Bay storms are usually short. The raft can be kept together and dragging avoided if the three middle boats put power on and take the strain off the anchor. But this can be overdone. Put someone on the foredeck to check the tension on and the direction of the rode.

Attention to a few simple rules will help:

- ✓ The captain of the boat with the anchor is the raft captain. Always ask his permission before joining or leaving the raft.
- ✓ Always use spring lines.
- ✓ Be prepared to furnish adequate bumpers, bow, stern and spring lines.
- ✓ Know how your boat is tied and whose lines are used.
- ✓ Always approach a raft from astern. Always leave a raft by dropping astern.
- ✓ Don't undo a line until you are certain of what you are doing.
- ✓ Limit the size of overnight rafts. Three boats are plenty. Five is an absolute maximum.

From the Chesapeake Tartan 30 Association, many thanks, Alberg 30s, wherever you may be rafting.

