


EXPERT ON BOARD

Tom Cunliffe has sailed tens of thousands of miles all over the world and has been a Yachtmaster Examiner since 1978



Shorthanded sailing



Jan's skillful touch on the helm is vital while Bob takes care of the heavy work up at the bow. If Helm has at some point done Crew's job, and visa versa, there is greater mutual understanding of what needs to be achieved

Tom Cunliffe, who has sailed with his wife Ros since the 1970s, offers practical advice for those cruising as couples or with small crews

Sailing with a full crew has a lot going for it, but getting everyone together at the right time can be stressful. Also,

many couples or old friends are content with their own company. It's perfectly possible to sail a modern cruiser of up to 45ft two-up, even if both parties are not

equally experienced. The secret is remarkably simple: it's all about communicating and being honest.

Who's in charge doesn't much matter, so long as everyone

understands their responsibilities. Sexual stereotypes are, mercifully, a thing of the past. A man who loves to cook should get on with it. Everyone must do their turn at sweeping out, and if the lady of a classic couple has it in mind to navigate, it would be a foolish man who stood in her way. My own wife Ros, with whom I have

Communication between crew and helm is the key to success with anchoring and indeed all two-handed manoeuvres

It makes sense for the stronger of the two to do the heavy jobs, like handling the anchor. If neither feels up to it, an electric windlass can save the day



sailed thousands of miles two-up, has no interest in taking charge of berthing or navigating, but she absolutely loves making a home in a boat. Over the years, she's also become the best crew in the business, more than capable of bringing the boat to a safe haven should anything happen to me. She has no ticket and has never

'The secret is simple: it's all about honest communication'

been on a course, but she's at peace with the status quo and it works for both of us. A couple we often sail with are totally different. There's no discernible skipper on their yacht, they just sort things out between them.

We went sailing two-up with Bob and Jan Trimble, two YM readers from near Winchester,

Hampshire, on their Arcona 400 Arc, to find out their tips for short-handed cruising. As with many things, we discovered there are few absolute rules, but there are some suggestions that might make life easier.

Tom's expert cruising tips overleaf ➔

PHOTO: MALCOLM WHITE
WWW.WHITEPA.CO.UK

Share your goals

You need to share your cruising goals. Sailor 'A' might be desperate to get to South Brittany from The Solent, never mind if the forecast is southwesterlies for the coming week. Sailor 'B' might hate beating in open water but be hesitant about suggesting an alternative. 'A' will carry the day, 'B' will become increasingly disaffected and by the time they've reached Guernsey, will



Discuss what you'd both like to achieve and find mutual ground

likely be enquiring about ferries home. Understanding, communication and a give-and-take attitude is the cure!

Navigation

Passage planning

The more experienced of the partnership can take the lead, but there's no reason for both not to understand the issues. Two heads are invariably better than one, and planning together is a great way of learning the essentials of chartwork painlessly.



Two heads are better than one when it comes to chartwork and passage planning

Log book

On passage, the ship's log is as critical two-up as it is on a Yachtmaster exam. Make sure that both can and do make regular entries. In an emergency, this may prove a life-saver.

Chart plotter

Short-handed sailing is about making life simple, so it's great to have a chartplotter on board. Anyone who can operate a DVD recorder and watch a television can use one. With the projected track feature, anyone can easily maintain a course.



Using a chartplotter sensibly can make life easier – the key to short-handed sailing

Size of boat



The Arcona 400 has a moderate freeboard, but some larger yachts have such high topsides the less nimble may find it tricky climbing on and off

In the modern marine market, people are buying ever larger boats. Nothing wrong with that, but if you regularly sail short-handed, there can be a temptation to buy bigger than is actually required. As the boat gets longer, the freeboard can get higher, mooring lines grow heavier and longer, fenders become a huge, fat nightmare, main booms are too high for shorter folk to reach. For two people not planning to live aboard or sail across the North Atlantic, a modern 35-footer is more than adequate. There's space for children, or the occasional weekend guest, and it's manoeuvrable. Having said all that, Bob and Jan handled their 40ft Arcona with aplomb! That is testament to their seamanlike approach as well as the lay-out of the yacht.



It's only sensible for both parties to keep an eye out for marks and buoys



With confidence in your autopilot, you'll start using it close in. It'll free you up to do all sorts of jobs around the boat

On passage

Pilotage

Inshore pilotage is where partnerships really come into their own. My wife and I always work together when we're approaching a harbour. We have the chart on deck – in plastic if it's raining and weighed down with a winch handle in strong winds – and together we spot buoys and look out for unexpected hazards and other craft. Especially in the



Keep the watch system simple – in daylight hours we operate a casual rota according to tiredness

dark, I find her eyesight is a tad better than mine and her distance perspective is acute. If one of us can't discern the mark, the other gets it nine times out of 10.

Watchkeeping

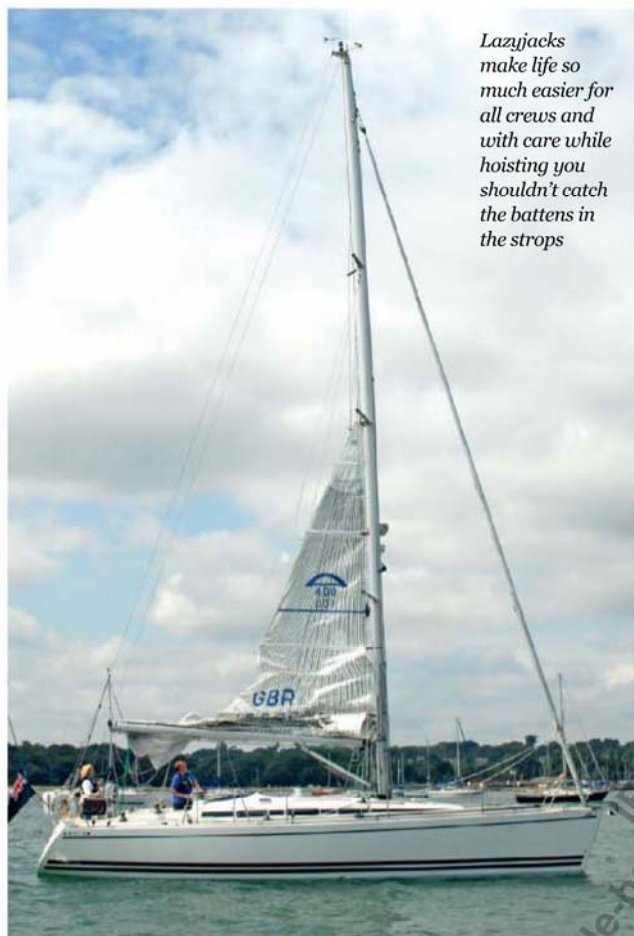
On a one-night trip and anything longer, we simply do three hours on, three hours off during the 12 hours of nominal night time – typically from 1900 to 0700. During daylight, we operate a casual system, keeping the deck according to tiredness and personal conscience. In hard

weather, we may cut the watch to one or two hours. So long as the autopilot is working, there's no need to be on deck constantly. Nip below to brew up when it's quiet, fill in the log, visit the heads – the night soon passes.

Autopilot

Again, it's about making life easy. Modern units are very reliable and set you free to reef or tack or see to the boat in a thousand ways, even for a few seconds. Once you're confident of its reliability, don't be afraid to use it close in.

Sail handling



Lazyjacks make life so much easier for all crews and with care while hoisting you shouldn't catch the battens in the strops

Mainsail

A mainsail handling system that works is a real bonus here. I love a good stackpack. At their best, the sail drops straight in. It can be zipped up later. Hoisting is equally simple. Single-line reefing works well for Bob and Jan on their Arcona, but I've seen systems where Captain Friction can be a problem. My advice is, if you do have single-line reefing, never pull the slack through into the cockpit. Always chuck the slack reefing lines into the stow somehow. And remember, while reefing the mainsail, an autopilot will keep the boat on that close reach which guarantees an easy ride on the winches.

Genoa

It's a fair assumption that most boats now have roller genoas. So long as these are well maintained they are a boon, however if they get sticky they can be another cause of civil strife. The obvious solution is to lubricate them according to the maker's specification. Remember, too, that much can be achieved in the way of lightening the

RIGHT: Helm can hold the boat just above close-hauled while Crew grinds in the headsail, to avoid domestic strife



Single-line reefing, with everything led aft, is favoured by Bob and Jan, but beware halyard friction on some systems that can make reefing inordinately tough

burden by running the yacht off the wind and hiding the headsail in the shadow of the main, before attempting to reef or roll it away.

Tacking

It makes sense for the stronger person to be on the winches, but winching can be eased by good helming. The trick is to come swiftly through the wind, then hold the boat five or 10 degrees above close hauled on the new tack while the sail is ground in.



Anchoring and mooring

Anchoring

All boat handling involving ropes needs good communication. Develop a system that works for you and which doesn't involve shouting from one end of the boat to the other. My wife and I point in the direction the boat is to turn, and rotate a finger downwards for astern,

upwards for ahead. The main issue with short-handed anchoring is deciding who's going to drive and who will heave the heavy stuff around. I generally drive our boat coming in alongside, but I never do when we're anchoring. It simply isn't right to expect a lightweight woman to do battle

with 20kg or more of galvanised steel when there's someone double her size shouting orders from the cockpit.

Mooring

Picking up a mooring requires more accurate placing of the boat than anchoring and, so long as Helm is doing a good job, it also demands less muscle. I drive, therefore, and my wife picks up. However, the job is not over once the boathook is on the buoy – the mooring loop must be secured. In a running tide, this may mean I go on working the power. In slack water with the boat blowing off, I go forward to lend a hand.



The stronger of the pair should be lumbered with the heavy bow work



*ABOVE: Communication by simple hand signals is all you need to keep things running smoothly
RIGHT: Helm can come forward to help secure the buoy line if needs be*



Arriving in a berth

The question for many couples here is 'who does what?' If the man likes boat handling and the woman isn't fussed about it, let him get on with it, but only if the lady is reasonably mobile. Where she's not so good on her legs, she's going to have to learn to handle the boat. Happily for Mr Average, however, his partner has very likely enjoyed fewer business lunches than he has, and can hop ashore like a gazelle.

Preparation is vital. Ropes should be laid out ready, fenders rigged well before arrival, and so on. My wife and I often



Rig the boat so you can go in either side to

approach strange harbours set up for 'either side'. It seems a lot of hassle, but it defuses many a fraught situation in the heat of battle.

Approaching the berth, Helm's job is to steer the right part of the boat close enough in for Crew to hop off.



PHOTOS: MALCOLM WHITE

Bob lays the mooring lines so they're easy to grab from boat or shore

Without a bow thruster, two options generally present themselves:

(a) Secure a short springline from somewhere abaft the boat's pivot point, then motor slowly ahead against it while you run out your lines. The spring may be best on the midships cleat. If the stern swings out, try taking the line to a cockpit winch.

(b) The bow line is made up so the bight is secure on board. Crew carries a reasonable length ashore, takes up the slack and makes it off on a suitable cleat or post. Crew then walks briskly aft and is handed the stern line with a loop at the end. Crew drops

this over a cleat and Helm rattles in the slack and makes fast.

Now, both go forward. Crew prepares a loop in the end of the bow line ashore. Crew uncleats the line and drops the loop over the cleat as Helm whizzes in the slack and secures on board. You now have two lines properly set with the ends on the dock and secured on the yacht. The springs can be run at leisure, but be sure it's 'one rope, one job, one rope, one cleat'. Anything else leads to confusion and hassle.

If the yacht has a bow thruster, the best point to step off may well be the quarter. So long as Crew can secure the blunt end of the boat, all Helm has to do is 'thrust' the bow in, regardless of wind, until Crew secures a line.



LEFT: Jan steps ashore with a line on the midships cleat

Departing a berth

The main short-handed issue here is to make sensible use of slip-lines. If you're springing off a dock with a stern spring, it may be easier for Crew to stand on the pontoon with a single turn on the cleat until you're ready to go. Crew then whips off the turn and steps aboard as Helm engages ahead and moves off. This won't work with a yacht as high as a block

of flats, of course, but with sensible freeboard it can be the safest option. We don't use slip lines unless we have to, but if the boat is high-sided and Crew isn't of the nimblest, slip-lines may have to be the order of the day. In most situations, they cause extra work. When they're needed, be sure they are going to run smoothly.



Only use slip lines when you need them. A fouled line can ruin a simple procedure



There's nothing wrong with a judicious push with the boathook

PHOTO: MALCOLM WHITE



Jan and Bob Trimble have been sailing together since they married 22 years ago. They cruise the Solent and English Channel

PHOTO: DAVID HARDING



They're not afraid of using the spinnaker but often rig the pole in the marina

Cruising two-up: an alternative view



**Rob Peake
talks to
Bob and
Jan Trimble who
cruise two-up on
an Arcona 400 Arc**

Bob and Jan Trimble live near Winchester, Hampshire, and sail their Arcona 400 Arc regularly from their berth in Ocean Village at the Royal Southampton Yacht Club. They cruise the Solent and English Channel and take part in double-handed races organised by the RSYC. Having sailed together since they married 22 years ago, they are a slick team, with a practised way of working the boat that, interestingly, is not always in keeping with Tom Cunliffe's way of doing things.

Bob says: 'We believe modern 40-footers are fine for cruising two-up, plus you get faster and more comfortable passage-making. We passage plan

according to a 7-knot cruising speed. The boat has single-line reefing and we find it perfect for couples, avoiding one or both going forward to the mast in rough weather. Maybe one of the party doesn't mind doing so, but the other may be concerned on their behalf. Generally, we reef early, but we also believe in the old adage of "an extra half knot over 12 hours means an hour less on passage".

They bought Arc second-hand last year, after many years of chartering led them to take a share of a Bénéteau 36 in 2001 and then to buy a Maxi 1050, Max, in 2005.

Bob (56) is an RYA Yachtmaster Ocean and sailing instructor. He runs his own software company and also an RYA sailing school, South Coast Sailing, using Arc, on the weekends. Jan (52) is an RYA Day Skipper and runs her own consultancy business.

Arc is immaculate and boasts a number of features which make good sense for all crews, not just those casting off two-handed.

Bob says: 'By the far the most important thing is communication. Next is staying fit and well, because if one of you is out of action the other is sailing solo. This



Thermos pots filled with a hot meal, prepared before setting sail

is about staying warm, dry and hydrated, but also about not doing any job without thinking it through and not rushing unnecessarily.

'If we know we're likely to fly the spinnaker, we'll probably rig the pole in the marina. We are cautious about using the spinnaker and, interestingly, have seen the boat perform just as well under poled-out headsail. We also have a Code Zero (asymmetric gennaker) on its own furler for use as a lightweight genoa, a specification that comes into its own on long

reaches where our relatively small jib doesn't have the power.

'Other features we find useful on deck include a chartplotter and remote VHF/DSC radio on the binnacle, to save on trips below. We use jackstays and clip on earlier and more frequently than when fully crewed. We wear lifejackets on deck and each of us has a Personal Locator Beacon and waterproof hand-held VHF to carry if standing watch alone. Our liferaft is stowed on the pushpit where it can be launched without having to be manhandled.

'One of our key things is a cockpit data folder, made up of vital information from the almanac and other useful sources, to minimise work done underway. We're never afraid to use checklists, for instance listing jobs to do when leaving and arriving.

'Down below, we have Thermos pots we can fill with a hot meal before we leave, so no cooking is needed underway. We have lee cloths on the saloon settee for the off-watch crew and generally make sure everything is in its place so it can be found at once.

'Coming alongside, we ensure the cockpit is kept clear and we often lay the warps out along the guardrails, so they can be reached by us or anyone ashore easily.' ▲

*Thanks to Bob and Jan Trimble for their help on our photo shoot, also to Arcona Yachts.
Tel: 023 8045 7770.
Email: Info@ArconaYachts.com.
Website: www.arconayachts.com*