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Dinghy Management
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My dinghy has a mind of its own. No matter what I want it to do, it always does the opposite, and when I think it's going to do the opposite, it finds something else to do. When I tie up parallel to a dock, I can later be sure of finding the dinghy wedged in under the dock. To set it free, usually requires a superhuman effort in gymnastics. And when sailing with quartering seas in strong winds, I periodically find myself eyeball to eyeball with the dinghy abeam of my stern rail. A second later, it jerks back on its painter and I find it frolicking in search of another wave to surf on. Then there are those times, in close quarters under reverse power when the painter decides to cozy up to my prop. But the one that gets me the most, is at two AM when the dinghy decides to knock gently but repeatedly on the hull just to check if I was asleep yet...

Now I realize that better organized sailors may say that if this dummy skipper would properly tie off the dinghy in these situations, it would be no problem. But most methods I've seen require many lines and fenders and require a corresponding effort to undo. If for example, before docking parallel, I brought the dinghy alongside on the outboard side, secured it fore and aft and placed a fender between it and my hull, it would behave in a manner appropriate to a properly tended dinghy. And, before bedding down for the night, I could, like the books describe, use my spinnaker pole to tie the dinghy away from the hull. This operation takes a bit of doing and requires me to restrain both the pole and the dinghy. In the morning or during an anchor emergency I'd have to undo the entire arrangement. I've often wondered how come, in all my years of sailing, I've rarely seen another skipper do this with his dinghy and pole.

Well, I've chanced on a solution to most of these dinghy doodles that is simplicity itself: Use a double painter, one secured to each stern cleat, and adjust the length, long or short, as follows:

- When underway, adjust the double painters to a long length of your liking. You will find that the dinghy tracks better, frolics and yaws a little less, and is generally less of a nuisance. In addition, you have double security with the two painters.
- When coming into port or docking or whenever you may be maneuvering or reversing in close quarters under power, haul in on both painters and tie them off very short so that the dinghy bow is right up close to the center of your stern. You can now practically forget that you own a dinghy. It's simply there and it follows you around like a well trained puppy. Even when you go in reverse, it just turns a little to one side and backs up with you.
- For anchoring, especially on those windless nights when the dinghy does most of its hull-knocking, keep the double painters tied up real short with her bow centered on your stern. You can even tie up short enough to lift the dinghy bow out of the water and put a throwable seat cushion between the dinghy and your stern. Restrained this way, the dinghy simply has no way of sneaking around for a two AM rap on your hull, And I find it so much easier to do and undo than any other method that I'm I aware of.

This more kindly dinghy action results from the fact that you've restrained her head and her stern has to follow, She has less mobility contrary to what your boat is doing than when tied up tight with two painters she can only turn about 45 degrees to your boat's centerline, even in reverse. When the painters are out long and you are sailing in quartering seas, the painter to the far side cleat becomes taught sooner than a single painter would and forces the dinghy to remain closer to centerline. This seems to reduce the side to side swings, but, of course, does not totally eliminate them.

So management of a contrary dinghy gets down to this simple formula: Use double painters and adjust them long or very short as described. Other than that, you hardly have to think about it.