

EXPERT ON BOARD

Euwe Kooi, owner of KM Yachtbuilders in Makkum, the Netherlands, has been box berthing for years and knows all the tricks



An expert's guide to box berthing



PHOTO: DIETER WANKE/ALAMY

Box berths can involve wooden posts, like these ones at Yachthafen Konstanz, in Germany



PHOTO: F. BILGER PHOTOESIGNAL/ALAMY

Box berths galore in Yachthafen Herrenbrücke on Lake Constance, Germany

Dutch boatbuilder Euwe Kooi has been box berthing all his life. He shows Chris Beeson how the pros do it

If you're ever tempted to explore the wonderful cruising ground that is the Baltic, you'll have to moor in box berths. Although almost entirely unknown in the UK, they are very common throughout northern Europe. They're abundant in the Netherlands as well as Scandinavia, and you'll even find them in Belgium. Some have wooden posts at one end and a pontoon at the other, others have buoys with rings on top instead of posts but all form a box of sorts in which a boat is moored.

Got a rubbing strake?

After your first attempt at box berthing you will understand perfectly why almost all Swedish- and Dutch-built boats have rubbing strakes.

On arrival, when you contact the harbourmaster, you may be asked for your beam as well as length. For obvious reasons, don't be tempted to fib on either in the hope of a cheaper berth. If you can't get hold of the harbourmaster, look for a likely-sized berth, ideally a metre wider than your beam, with a green tag. Berths tagged red are unavailable.

What do you do if you haven't got a strake? Assuming the posts are



Strakes are evident on this Hallberg-Rassy 412 from Sweden

far enough apart for you to be able to get in without touching them, there's no guarantee you'll thread the needle. Fenders aren't much use and may even stop your progress into the berth if they get jammed between hull and post. Many

recommend taking two thick manila lines and rigging them from bow to stern running along the topsides at the most beamy point of the boat: just under the toerails on most boats, lower down if the topsides have a bit of tumblehome. If you can't find thick manila, try foam pipe lagging on a thinner line.

Have fenders rigged both sides but lying on the sidedecks rather than over the side, ready to kick over once you're past the posts. If you're going in stern-to, rig a big fender, a ball ideally,

on the transom in case your bow crew doesn't snub the bow lines in time, and another on the leeward quarter in case the crew snubs the bow line too soon and you blow down onto the leeward boat. Communication is key.

PHOTO: GRAHAM SNOOK/VM



KM Yachtbuilders' Euwe Kooi instructs Theo on the finer points of box berthing aboard his Bestevaer 45ST PURE

Most Baltic boats prefer to moor bow-to the pontoon as it gives more privacy when you're sitting in the cockpit. This is why most Baltic boats have walk-through pulpits and often bow boarding ladders too. Boats with closed pulpits may choose to moor stern-to for ease of boarding.

The key to box berthing is getting the windward bow or stern lines onto the posts as you go past. Standing amidships, at the point of maximum beam, if you can get close enough to drop a bowline or spiced loop over the post, all you need to do is adjust the mooring line on the cleat to get the boat in position. Dropping a bight (a doubled line) over the post is more reliable, as you can't be sure of being close enough to drop over a loop whereas you can throw over a bight, but you do then need to run the working end through a fairlead and get it onto a cleat, which takes slightly longer.

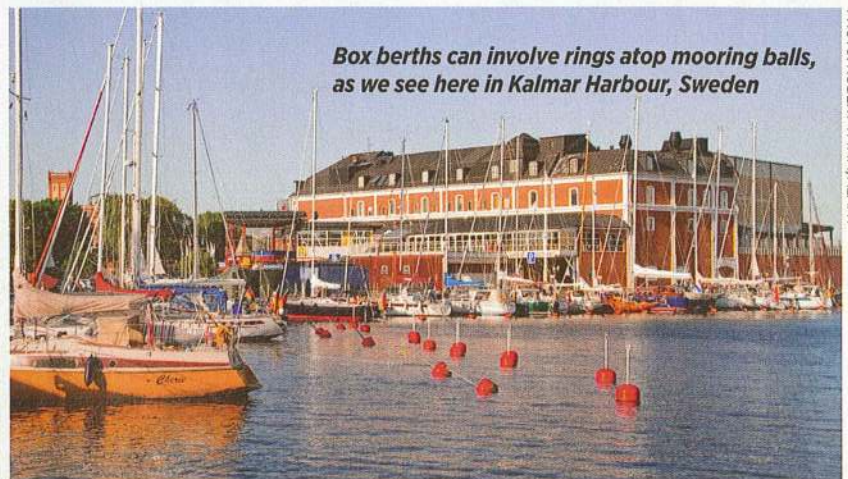
A doubled line offers more options when it comes to leaving. If you use a loop, replacing it with a doubled line that you can slip from deck is a bit tricky if you can't reach the post. You'll need to be very sure that you can remove the bowline or loop as the boat exits past the post with you standing amidships. If you can't, you'll

have to leave the mooring line behind.

As a general rule it helps to motor ahead against the stern line to control the boat, to use the stern line as a bow spring. So if you're going in bow-to, get the windward stern line round the post, load it on a winch at the helm and hand it to the skipper, who can motor against the stern line, easing and snubbing it while liaising with the crew at the bow to get the right distance off the pontoon. Going in stern-to, it's the same process but get a

line onto the windward pontoon cleat first so the skipper can motor against that.

Euwe believes bow in is easier, but it can be trickier to get out, simply due to the vagaries of running astern at low speeds. He also says the most important lesson is 'Don't stop!' as things could go horribly wrong if the boat gets blown down a row of posts and bows. Even if you can't get a single line on, once in the berth you can rest on the leeward boat's fenders while you sort yourself out. ➔



Box berths can involve rings atop mooring balls, as we see here in Kalmar Harbour, Sweden

PHOTO: ROBERT WYATT/ALAMY

PHOTO ABOVE: GRAHAM SNOOK.COM

PHOTO: GRAHAM SNOOK/™

Entering bow to



PHOTOS: GRAHAM-SNOOK.COM

Standing midships, Theo drops the windward stern line over the post as it passes then walks it aft, runs it through a fairlead and hands it to Eeuwe at the helm, who puts it on a winch. Theo then goes forward to rig the windward bow line

Step by step - entering bow to

1 With bow and stern lines rigged, the crew stands midships to drop the windward stern line over the post, then walks it aft and gives it to the skipper who loads it on a winch

2 The crew gets the windward bow line on and communicates distance off to the skipper, who can either motor ahead and ease the stern line, or motor astern and haul it in

3 All lines are rigged and the boat is centred in the berth. If boat and berth are about the same length, rig a bow spring from the windward post to midships to keep her off the dock

TOP TIP If you're berthing single-handed, get the stern line on if you can, then motor gently ahead against it, or rest on the fenders of the leeward boat while you sort out your lines

GRAPHICS: MAXINE HEATH

Rig two bow lines and two stern lines and bring the stern lines outside the lifelines to midships. Rig fenders but keep them on the side decks until you're in the berth.

Approach into wind or stream, whichever is stronger. If the skipper has two crew, have one either side at midships so they can drop lines over both posts as they pass. With just one crew, choose the windward post and rig a big fender on the leeward bow.

Once the windward stern line is over the post, take it aft, put it on a winch and hand it to the skipper, then look after the windward bow line. After stopping the boat with a burst of astern, the skipper can motor ahead against the stern line and adjust it to get the right distance off the dock, using crew feedback. The crew drops the windward bow line over a pontoon cleat and secures it at the bow.

Adjust bow and stern lines and use the engine to get the leeward stern line over the leeward post, then do the same to get the leeward bow line on. Finally, rig a bow spring from the windward post to your midships cleat if the stern is level with the posts, to keep you off the pontoon, then deploy your fenders.

If you're alone, try to get a windward stern line on and either motor against it, or rest on the boat to leeward, which should have fenders out, while you sort out your lines. Take your time.

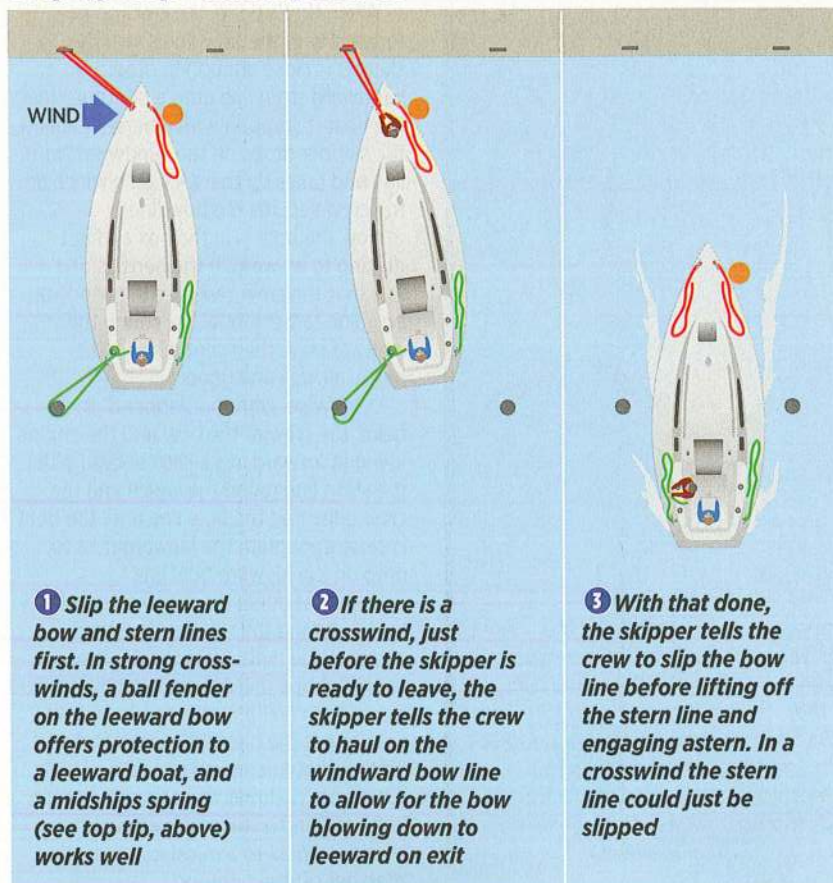
Some skippers prefer crossed stern lines but walking the windward stern line to the leeward quarter outside everything takes time. If you want the added comfort, put the windward stern line on the leeward cleat, drop it over the post and secure to the windward cleat, vice versa for leeward, then swap the working ends once stable.

Leaving bow to



To help counter the effect of wind on the bow, Eeuwé tells Theo to haul on the windward bow line just before slipping. With the engine in neutral, Eeuwé hauls on the spring to ease her off the dock before lifting the spring off the post

Step by step – leaving bow to



Again, if you use a loop instead of a slipped line for your bow lines, change them for doubled lines that can be slipped from deck. With the engine running, slip the leeward stern line and put the windward stern line on a winch near the helm.

The skipper then engages ahead, motoring against the stern line and the crew eases the leeward bow line. On boats with beamy sterns, this may create a turning moment that drives the bow to windward. If that happens, drop some revs until she's stable in the berth, then the crew slips the leeward bow line.

When the skipper's checked there's no traffic and is ready to go, the windward bow line is slipped, there's a big burst of astern and the skipper spins the windward stern line off the winch as the crew comes aft to haul it aboard.

If a strong crosswind threatens to blow your bow onto your leeward neighbour, put your biggest fender on the leeward bow before removing any lines, just in case. To help prevent that happening, the crew, wearing gloves, can let the windward bow line run around the cleat, gently snubbing if necessary but never stopping the boat, so that it acts something like a drogue to keep the boat straight when leaving the berth – but remember to slip it the moment the bow is clear of the post and boat to leeward.

If it's really blowing, a midships breast line that can be dropped over the windward post is a useful precaution to keep you clear of the leeward post, eased and snubbed as the boat runs astern and slipped once you're clear.

Once clear of the box, bring the stern into the wind. The bow will blow down and help speed up your rate of turn. →

Entering stern to



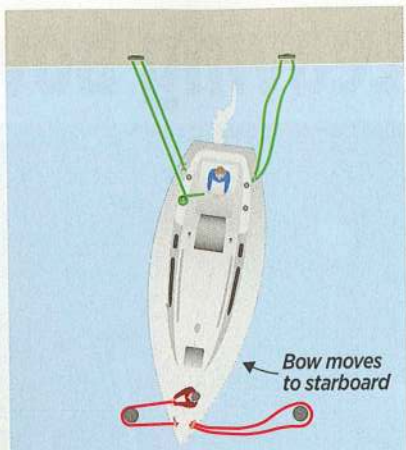
PHOTOS: GRAHAM-SNOOK.COM

Eeuwe is checking to make sure that Theo has got the windward bow line over the post. As Theo then takes up slack, Eeuwe checks the stern where Kieran is ready with the windward stern line, which will go onto a winch to adjust distance off

Step by step - entering stern to

WIND →

- 1** With windward and leeward bow lines rigged, the crew stands midships to get the windward bow line on the post as it passes, which is then taken forward and the slack is taken up
- 2** When the transom is close enough to get a stern line over the pontoon cleat, the skipper stops the boat with a burst of forward, gets the stern line on and loads it on a winch
- 3** By easing the windward bow and stern lines, and using engine power, the boat can be manoeuvred in the box to rig the leeward bow and stern lines, then squared up in the berth



GRAPHICS: MAXINE HEATH

TOP TIP *If there's no wind, with one stern line on a winch and the other eased, the skipper can motor against the stern line to haul the bow across to the post so the crew can rig the second bow line*

Rig bow and stern lines with the windward stern line ready to go round a winch near the helm, and fender the leeward quarter and transom. Approach by running astern into the wind and, if it's strong, keep on a fair bit of way to prevent the bow blowing off as the boat straightens up into the berth. The skipper needs to get the boat close enough to the windward post to let the crew drop the bow line over it.

When that's done, the crew goes forward with the bow line. Once the skipper is close enough to drop the windward stern line onto a pontoon cleat, the boat is stopped with a burst of ahead, the skipper drops on the windward stern line and takes up the slack on a winch as the crew secures the bow line.

Now the boat is in the box and not drifting to leeward. If the berth is of a size that the crew can ease the windward bow line to get a bow line round the leeward post, then centre her in the berth, all well and good.

Otherwise, with the skipper at the helm, the crew at the bow and the engine idling in forward, it's a case of easing out the stern line round the winch and the crew adjusting the bow line until the boat is close enough to the leeward post to drop on the leeward bow line.

With that done, the crew eases both bow lines and the skipper hauls her astern, either with the winch or the engine, drops the leeward stern line over a pontoon cleat and secures it. Adjust all lines to get the boat the right distance off the pontoon and square in the berth. If the boat is almost the same size as the berth, adding a stern spring from the windward post to a midships cleat will keep her off the pontoon.

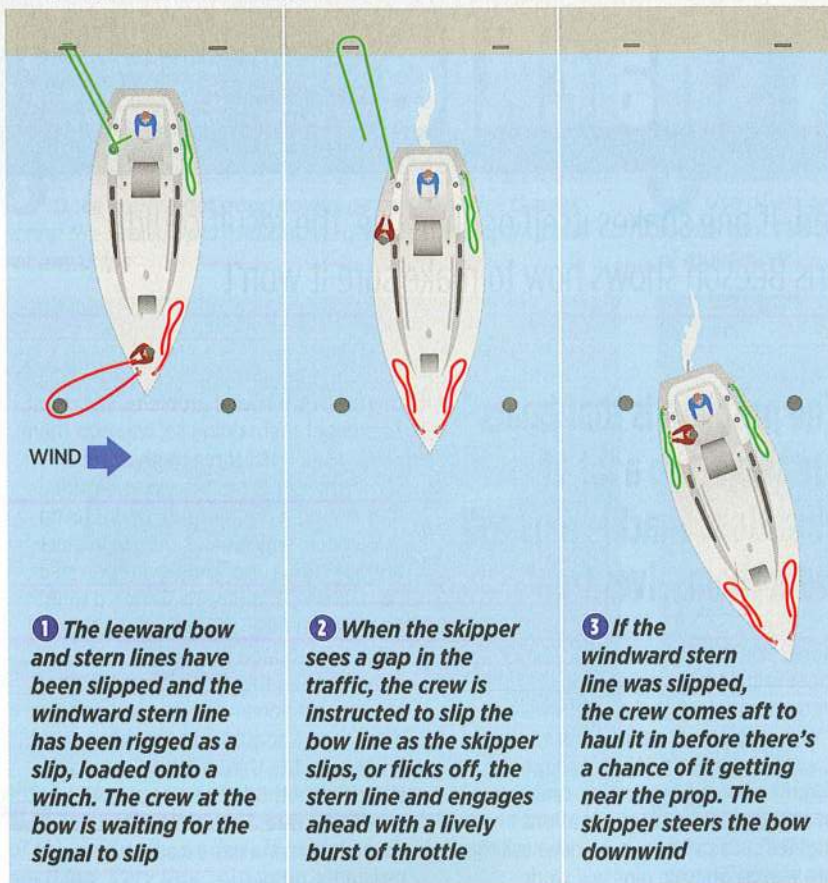
Leaving stern to

GRAPHICS: MAXINE HEATH



Euwe is ready to leave the berth so Theo hauls the bow a touch to windward to counter the effect of any crosswind. Hauling on the windward bow line before slipping it would have been much less precarious than this looks

Step by step - leaving stern to



TOP TIP If you need to leave bow to windward, use a slipped windward bow line at least twice as long as the boat. When the stern is clear of posts and bows, the crew snubs the windward bow line, hauling the bow to windward



Slip bow and stern lines off the leeward side. If you use loops instead of bights, replace the windward ones with doubled lines that can be slipped from on deck. Put the windward stern line onto a winch near the helm so that the skipper can slip it. The crew walks forward and, when the skipper has checked for traffic and is ready to go, the crew slips the windward bow line and heads to the cockpit as the skipper spins the windward stern line off the winch, and the skipper, or preferably the crew, hauls in the line.

If there's a bit of a crosswind, when the skipper gives the order to slip, the crew can haul the bow a little to windward before slipping the bow line and coming aft, as this buys some time if the bow blows off. The skipper or crew then hauls in the stern line as the skipper gives the throttle a burst and off you go.

If you need to turn into a strong wind, you'll need a windward bow line that is longer than twice the length of the boat, doubled so you can slip it from deck, and low down on the post. Let it run until the stern is clear of posts and boats then, as the skipper turns to windward, snub the line to make a bow spring and the bow will haul to windward.

Then slip the line and haul it in very quickly to avoid fouling the prop. The line needs to be low on the post so that, when snubbed, it slaps against the hull instead of taking out your stanchions. The skipper needs to measure speed to avoid tearing cleats off the deck, too. If your lines aren't long enough, a midships line will suffice. However, running astern upwind is easier. ▲