

## Happy Hooking: The Art of Anchoring

By Capt. Alex Blackwell & Capt. Daria Blackwell

Review by Max Fletcher, Boston Station (GMP)

An afternoon spent watching the charter fleets of the British Virgin Islands will reveal that there is clearly a need for better education amongst boaters in the art of anchoring. Any CCA member will have witnessed numerous incidents of faulty anchoring technique, and some of us might even admit to an occasional circumstance where we could have done a better job ourselves. “Happy Hooking” is a comprehensive and readable book covering all aspects of the subject.

Keeping our boats moored properly is one of the most important acts of seamanship yachtsmen need to know. Every anchorage presents a different challenge due to the endless variation in bottom type, substrate density, swinging room, changes in wind direction, and so on. And every year we see or hear of incidents proving it is not an easy art to master, and many boaters have not taken the time to do so.

Yachtsmen tend to hold strong opinions on their choice of anchors, and many of us have personal anecdotes and stories that 'prove' ours is the superior anchor. Part of the problem is the near impossibility of making truly uniform, objective tests comparing anchors. Several of the more comprehensive recent tests are reviewed, but as the authors point out, different tests conducted by qualified parties sometimes come to contradictory conclusions. There are simply too many variables to make consistent and universal judgments. Therefore, much of the necessary knowledge comes down to real world experience and observation, a strong point of the book. The Blackwells have sailed a great many miles and spent a great deal of time observing and speaking with others on anchoring experiences.

The book is timely because of the tremendous evolution in anchor design that has taken place in recent years and continues right up to the present. For decades the CQR was the gold standard; now it has clearly been supplanted. As the authors point out, a plow anchor is designed to plow, and sometimes they do just that - clear across an anchorage. The newer scoop anchors, typified by the SPADE, Rocna, or Manson Supreme, are designed to dig. The harder you pull, the deeper they dig. I can attest to this from personal experience: in our first summer with a Rocna, my wife frequently felt the Rocna had gotten caught on something. It was noticeably harder to break out than had been our Delta, which itself had proven to be a reasonably good anchor for us.

“Happy Hooking” moves on to discuss anchor rodes, covering all the basics and some lesser known areas. For example, there are dangers inherent in stainless steel swivels, particularly if you can't inspect recessed areas and if they are subject to directional load for which they're not designed.

A comprehensive section on “Anchoring Techniques” is the heart of the book and is one where new boaters will have the most to learn. Selecting an anchorage, setting an anchor, judging swinging room and all the finer tangential points are covered. Another section on “Anchoring Etiquette” includes the many factors that, were they to be widely followed, would make anchorages safer and more enjoyable for all.

The book wisely suggests one consider alternatives to anchoring, such as heaving-to offshore rather than entering or remaining in an untenable anchorage, and explains the techniques to do so. It even includes a section on sunflower rafting.

**“Happy Hooking” is well organized, well illustrated, and easy to read. Much of the material will be familiar territory to CCA members. It should be mandatory reading for novice sailors and charter operators would do well to place copies throughout their fleet. This would be an excellent gift to up-and-coming boaters.**