

How to pick up a mooring buoy - under power

RYA Chief Instructor, Sail Cruising, Vaughan Marsh shares his top tips for picking up a mooring buoy under power.



There are many reasons to pick up a mooring buoy, but let's take a closer look at what's involved using the process – Appraise, Plan, Execute and Review

Appraise

1. Are you allowed to use the mooring? An almanac, local chart or harbour master can help you
2. Is there enough depth for your vessel? Are there any hazards to be aware of?
3. Which way to approach? Look at how other vessels are lying to the buoys and position your boat at the same angle to your selected buoy. If there are no other boats to act as a guide choose a down tide, or if no tide, downwind of the buoy.
4. Do a recce. Pass the buoy and check, what direction is the wind passing the over buoy? Is there any movement of water if so which direction is it flowing? What attachments are there on the buoy to secure too? What is the actual depth? What is your escape route if the pick-up is unsuccessful first time?

Plan

Manoeuvre your vessel to a safe area and create your plan then brief the crew and let them know what their role will be.

1. *Where to start your approach?*
Your approach should be down wind or down tide whichever is stronger, but it could also be a combination of the two. There is no definitive answer, you will need to monitor on the run in.
2. *What approach angle will you use?*
Once at your starting position, try and find a transit with the buoy and something behind it. When approaching the buoy maintain that transit to ensure you are not being pushed off by wind or tide.
3. *Where should the pick-up point be relative to the vessel?*
Many people pick up at the bow, but bear in mind once you are about a boat length from the buoy you can't see it! Try an approach where you are bringing the buoy alongside at the shrouds or mid-ships, preferably on the same side as the throttle control. If in a motor vessel or a vessel with high topsides sometimes an approach from the stern to pick up from the sugar scoop or bathing platform is easier. The vessel should be to leeward or down tide of the buoy so if you miss it the elements will push you away from it rather than onto it.
4. *Speed of approach*
Minimum boat speed for steerage is the key. Use transits to the side of your vessel to monitor your speed, it's much easier to put power on than take it off. Using the GPS or log for speed with a tide running is little or no use. A member of crew calling distance from the buoy can also be useful.
5. *What is your escape route?*
Work out which way you would turn to get the yacht into safe water for the whole of the approach.

6. *Lines rigged for the pick-up and boat hook ready*
One end of the warp will need to be made off on a cleat via a fairlead, the other end will need to be with a crew member on the pre-planned side of the yacht. If approaching the buoy as a sternboard approach, your bow line will need to be brought aft whilst ensuring it is led outside of any obstacles. Make sure your crew know what to do with the line once attached to the buoy and how to secure it to the yacht ensuring it is through a fairlead or the bow roller and not tangled or over the guard wires.
7. *To Lasso or not to lasso?*
Although probably not the preferred option sometimes a lasso is the easiest temporary option. Help crew rig the lasso and get them to practice throwing and securing it prior to the approach. Have a second line ready to use, as soon as you are attached by the lasso, attach the second line to the ring or loop on the buoy and remove the lasso. Don't stay on the lasso as it damages the buoy, creates chafe on your warp and can fall off of and get tangled around the buoy.
8. *How will the crew tell you how far to the buoy, where it is and when it is secure?*
Ensure you both understand the measurement i.e. feet or meters and that you they can see and hear each other. Working out some simple hand signals are also useful.
9. *Do the Crew understand what is expected of them?*
Once you have your plan make sure your brief your crew and confirm they understand their role.
10. *If at first you don't succeed!*
If you miss the buoy first time **don't** hurl abuse at the crew, use your escape route, have a think on why it didn't work, re-appraise, if it's a new plan tell the crew, re-rig and go again.

Execute

Once you have made your plan follow it. Constantly monitor your speed, depth, angle of approach and any hazards. Don't be afraid to abort and change the plan.

Review

Once secured to the buoy:

1. Determine how long you are going to stay
2. Check all lines are secured correctly to the deck and buoy. If staying for more than two hours or if it is a windy or choppy day, consider a second line though the securing point on the buoy as a round turn and two half hitches to remove chafe, leaving the other line slack as a safety line.
3. Remove as many chances of chafe as possible.
4. Look at other vessels around you and if the tide or wind changes how will this affect you or them?
5. If staying for a while, consider setting your anchor alarm.
6. If staying overnight consider rigging an all-round white.
7. Check the tide again to ensure there is enough water for your whole stay.
8. Contact the owner of the buoy to pay.
9. Review with the crew what went well and what if anything didn't.
10. Sit back and enjoy your new surroundings.