

HAPPY HOOKING: THE ART OF ANCHORING – Capt Alex Blackwell and Capt Daria Blackwell, 3rd edition. Published in soft covers by the authors and available through Amazon at £22.89. 378 229mm x 152mm pages with many black-and-white photographs and line drawings. ISBN 978-1-7957-1741-0

This is a big book – more than 350 pages – but then it's a big subject. Gather a cockpit full of sailors in any part of the world and it won't be long before the talk turns to anchors ... and anchoring ... and anchorages ... and more opinions on all of them than seem entirely credible. But this book is not really aimed at experienced sailors who have managed to get themselves as far as Nuku Hiva or the Drake Passage. It starts out with the premise that somebody has just bought his or her first boat and doesn't even know there are different types of anchor.

Actually, I wish I'd had a copy when I bought my present boat and found she came with the original 45 year old CQR. What followed was hours (weeks) of deliberating over magazine tests and YouTube videos, most of which seemed to contradict each other (see 'opinions' above). Happy Hooking summarises them all – and a lot more that you would never have considered without devoting your life to the subject, as the Blackwells seem to have done. After all, who knew about the Rocking Anchor or the Flying Anchor or the one that has an air bubble on the top to keep it upright, or the XYZ Extreme which looks like a piece of modern art – or the Box Anchor which might double as a cake tin...The authors treat them all to the same measured and dispassionate analysis – and no matter how many nights you have spent swinging to the hook, or how opinionated you may become with a glass of rum punch in your hand, you are guaranteed to find something here to help you counter somebody else's point of view – it really is that comprehensive.

Of course, the very fact that it sets out to be so all-encompassing means that experienced cruisers might be a little bemused to find step-by-step instructions on filling a bucket with seawater while the boat is moving – but then, how many times have you seen a novice nearly pull themselves over the side trying to do exactly that? And if you consider anchor-cleaning methods deserve a place in a book about anchoring, then why on earth not include letting the thing hang just below the surface while you motor on your way (as long you don't forget it, of course)?

Advice on heaving-to gets in there (well, you'd anchor if you could reach the bottom) and the use of drogues. In fact, by the time the authors get around to discussing prop-walk the reader might be forgiven for worrying about the amount of space in their on-board bookshelf. But did you know that you can tell a right-hand propeller by shaking hands with it? Considering the sheer weight of information, an index would have been helpful and the Blackwells – American members based in Ireland – tend towards Imperial measurements and US terminology – although there is a glossary at the back. Also, being self-published, it could have benefited from some independent editing.

There is one hilarious passage describing an ingenious system for distributing the chain in a below-decks anchor locker. This involves a bungee and a line through a series of blocks so that the foredeck crew can yank the chain sideways as it goes down. It sounds a great idea, well-deserving of the name the Anchor Yanker – although the authors' spellchecker has helpfully substituted a W for the Y! Never mind.

Buy the book. It's a treasure trove – even if for nothing more than the ability to stop any anchoring argument in its tracks by quoting the Intercept Theorem (a method for calculating scope by rode angle). The most useful formula, however, is the one for calculating your Proper Anchor Value. This is equal to the sum of Boat Value Before Hitting Rocks minus Boat Value After Hitting Rocks.

JP