

STRESS-FREE SAILING and STRESS-FREE NAVIGATION – Duncan Wells. Published in soft covers by Adlard Coles [www.adlardcoles.com] at £16.99 and £17.99 respectively. Both with 160 250mm x 180mm pages in full colour throughout. ISBNs 978-1-4729-0743-1 and 978-1-4729-6234-8.

When Flying Fish was offered a review copy of Stress-Free Sailing following its publication in 2015, I declined on the basis that OCC members already knew how to sail. Unfortunately I overlooked its subtitle, Single and Short-Handed Techniques, until a conversation with the author at Southampton Boat Show – by which time I'd already read much of Stress-Free Navigation – put me right. Although a small part of Stress-Free Sailing is indeed about the difference between running and reaching, far more is about manoeuvring a variety of boats in tight spaces with small crews – definitely relevant to OCC members, even those with large boats and bow-thrusters. Multihulls receive scant mention, but in all other ways Duncan Wells is admirably comprehensive. \

Not much point in putting your boat neatly alongside if she's not going to stay there, so he starts with line handling – coiling, throwing, knotting etc. Leaving and returning to alongside and finger berths occupies the next 47 pages – ahead, astern and sideways; with and without tidal streams, cross winds, boats in the way and sundry other hazards; in both fin and long-keeled boats. Only then do the sails go up. In addition to all the usual sail-handling topics I was particularly glad to see heaving-to covered in some detail. Too many cruisers assume that it's only possible with heavy, long-keel boats, even though, as Duncan says, "By playing with the variables you can get modern, fin-keel boats to heave-to quietly. It is all a question of adjusting the balance". A very useful tactic to cook a meal in bad weather, or simply have a rest, particularly for a short-handed crew if the self-steering (electronic or wind-vane) is struggling.

Stress-Free Navigation initially caught my eye because of its subtitle – Electronic and Traditional. Many of today's skippers have largely forgotten what to do if the electronics pack up, as they occasionally do – and are almost certain to if the yacht is struck by lightning – and one occasionally hears horror stories of yachts effectively disabled for this reason. And even without such drama, most of us have gaps in our knowledge – things we've forgotten, things we've never known, or things we've never needed to know because, for example, we've done most of our sailing outside areas with dramatic tidal ranges and streams. Stress-Free Navigation will fill in most of these gaps, and could be particularly useful to those visiting British or European waters for the first time. There's inevitably a bit of overlap between the two books – Stress-Free Sailing devotes seven pages to navigation, while Stress-Free Navigation includes the basics of sailing. Both cover anchoring, though Stress-Free Sailing does so in greater detail, and both conclude with man overboard recovery, a subject obviously close to Duncan's heart.

There's a third in the series, Stress-Free Motorboating – subtitled Single and Short-Handed Techniques for Rivers and Coasts – which might well be of interest to some members but which space constraints rule out covering in more detail here. I'd be amazed if that doesn't feature man overboard recovery too. Both books (and doubtless the third) are profusely illustrated with descriptively-captioned colour photographs and clearly-labelled line drawings. Those who wish can view action videos on their phone or iPad by scanning the QR codes scattered throughout both books (21 in Stress-Free Sailing, 15 in Stress-Free Navigation), videos which the rest of us can watch on our computers at westviewsailing.co.uk/stress-free-videos. As one might expect from their titles, Duncan's writing style in both books is authoritative but relaxed – he's an RYA instructor who runs his own sailing school, and it shows. He is refreshingly clear and logical in his approach, communicating both the joys of sailing and a calm and positive attitude to navigation, even to its more complicated and challenging (and some would say most fun) aspects. There can be few members, however experienced, who would not pick up something from both books, while less experienced crew would learn even more. Recommended.

AOMH