

Why

Docking a Power Boat

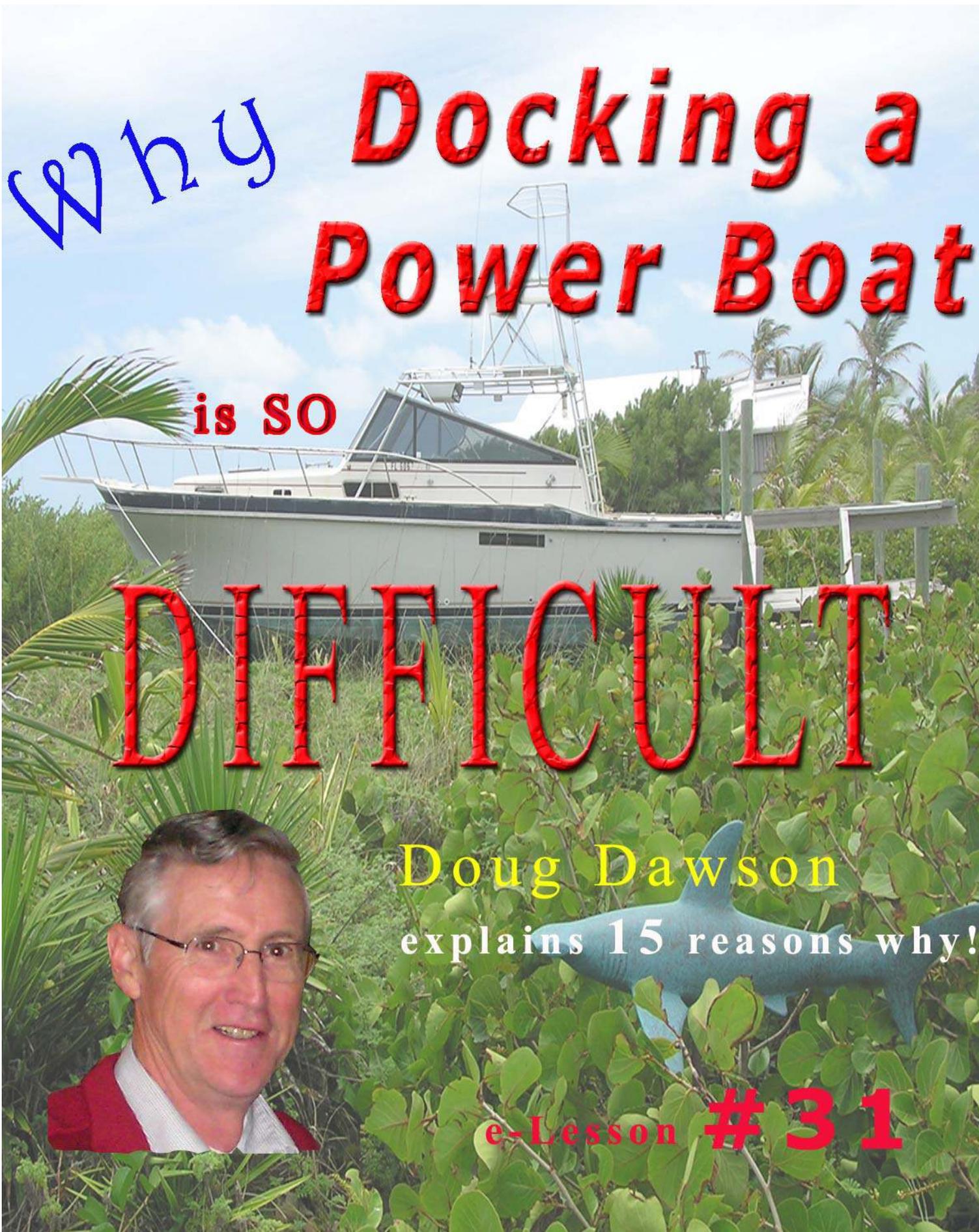
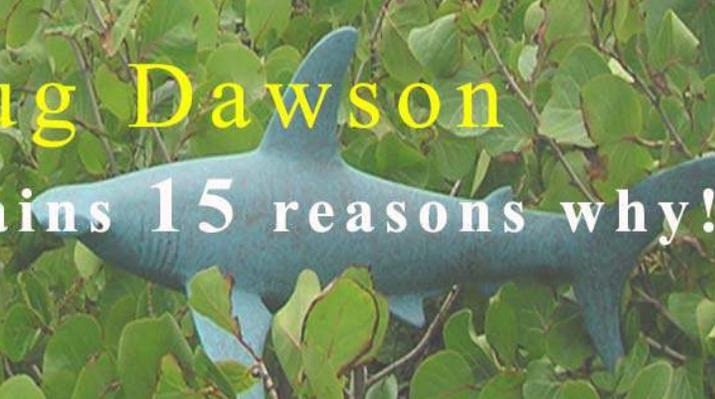
is SO

DIFFICULT

Doug Dawson

explains 15 reasons why!

e-Lesson # 31



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Why



“Why is docking a boat so easy for sailors,
and so difficult for power boaters?”

You’ve probably noticed that sailboats can turn at almost 90 degrees into their slips while hardly moving for a flawless landing.

You’ve probably also noticed that the vast majority of power boats have a much harder time docking. Their screw-ups may be entertaining to you, the observer, but it’s embarrassing and frustrating for Captain Crunch and his Crew.

Two common misconceptions that we’ve heard from power boaters over and over again are:

*“I can drive a car so I should be able to drive a boat.” –
Boats aren’t the same as cars! A boat is never in a fixed
location, it’s always moving and drifting and the drive
system and steering on a boat is at the back end instead of
the front.*

*“I watched other boaters dock, so I copy them” – Copying
someone else’s docking techniques is a huge mistake.
Firstly, he may not have the same type of boat and drive
system as you and secondly, even if his boat type and drive
system are the same, he may not be using the best docking
techniques.*

I was born into a family marina business where we sold, serviced and stored sailboats and power boats from 15’ to 55’—runabouts, cuddies, cruisers, yachts, trawlers, houseboats, cruise boats, landing barges, small sailing dinghies to 48’ ketches, jet boats, ice boats—all drive systems, even barges and steam boats to 74’. My family ate, slept and dreamed boats—even holidayed on boats.

e-Lesson #31 Why Power Boat Docking is Difficult

I was taught by my father to handle every type of boat. He was taught by his father who was taught by his father, who was taught by his father—five generations of knowledge and [my own experience](#). As a result, I learned to handle and dock every drive system and type of boat at a very young age, even before I was old enough to get a drivers' license for a car. I taught my Sea Scout Troop how to sail for 10 years.

Growing up in the marina and teaching power boaters and sailors, I assumed (maybe incorrectly) that everyone in the marine industry knew what I knew, and were also teaching their boaters. But, as it turns out, I was wrong. Everyone doesn't know what I know.

Doug's Definition of Docking:

Confidently and safely bringing your boat into your slip or alongside your dock AND securing it to the dock in any conditions without yelling, swearing, jumping, boat hooks, bionics, dock helpers, guesswork or embarrassment.

Every day, Brenda and I would witness power boaters screw up their docking. Sailors, on the other hand, seemed to be able to dock their boats without difficulty. Several years ago, we decided to do some research and find out why this was so.

Docking Instructions

Using current instructions on the market today, we pretended that we were new boaters just learning how to handle and dock a boat. We followed the instructions literally, word for word, applying none of our own knowledge. We were shocked! Following the instructions to the letter, we found that it was impossible to dock our 30' Twin I/O or any other power boat!

We picked up a current version of Boating Handbook approved by Transport Canada and the U.S. National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. The same thing happened. Docking a boat was way too difficult!

e-Lesson #31 Why Power Boat Docking is Difficult

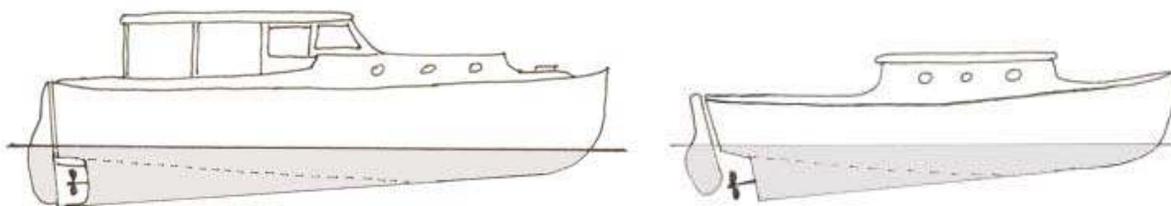
Our immediate response was “Why? Why don’t these instructions work for today’s boats? No wonder power boaters are screwing up their docking.

You’ve probably never asked “Why is it so easy to dock a sailboat and so difficult to dock a power boat?”

Well, there are plenty of reasons why...

Our research over the years, explained it for us. We discovered that, decades ago, instructions were written by sailors for sailboats. Power boaters were owned more by entrepreneurs who didn’t have or didn’t take the time to write. They were too busy running their businesses.

Back in the 20’s, 30’s and 40’s and 50’s when the original docking instructions were composed, there were only inboard sailboats and single inboard power boats. Sterndrives hadn’t been invented yet. Power boat bottoms back then, incorporated full length skegs and huge rudders permitting them to handle like sailboats as shown in the pictures below. A typical old style cruiser and launch (runabout) shown below, had full length skegs and huge rudders.



These documented instructions became the “Bible” and worked well for the boats back then. But today, they are still used as the reference by many instructors and writers, who are using these same old, out-dated instructions, for all boats—power and sail, regardless of drive system and number of engines.

The problem is, neither the old out-dated instructions nor the new regurgitated old information, applies to any of today’s power boats—not even the single inboard power boats.

No wonder boaters (using these outdated instructions or even new instructions using regurgitations of this old information) are having trouble docking their boats. It's not their fault, it's just incorrect instruction!

So, if you use these docking instructions from the 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's intended for sailboats or the old style single inboard power boats with skegs and huge rudders; they won't work, because there are so many differences on any power boat today. You will have difficulty docking your boat and

It's not your fault!

I am sure you will certainly find the following list of 15 differences between power boats and sailboats, reason enough to justify my conclusions about the need for updated power boat docking instructions for each and all power boat drive systems.

1. Bottom Configuration - Keel vs. No Keel



Sailboats have big keels and giant rudders – power boats don't.

A sailboat with a keel or centre board can idle almost at a dead stop around what appears to be a sharp right angle turn and into a slip for a flawless landing and docking, as if it were on rails. It's actually a very small radius curve.

A power boat, on the other hand, would slide out of the right angle turn, if the driver ever attempted it. Trying to pull off a right angle turn, would cause a power boat to slide



sideways into the next slip with the momentum of the approach down the fairway, because of the flat toboggan-like bottom. Also, it would be blown off course in the same wind conditions; if it approached the dock as slowly as a sailboat can.

e-Lesson #31 Why Power Boat Docking is Difficult

Docking instructions originally intended for sailboats simply do not apply and will not work for any power boat drive systems—not even the single inboard power boats. Why? Because the old single inboards from the 30's, 40's and 50's had full length keels or skegs and huge rudders which allowed them to dock like sailboats.

Today, even single inboards from the 60's, 70's and 80's have no keels, no skegs, just flat bottoms and little tiny rudders.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

2. Windage—Low vs High



Most sailboats are built with maximum height of 4' off the water. Conversely, power boats have superstructure and lots of canvas enclosures that greatly increase the windage. They can be

anywhere from 5' to 15' off the water. As a result, power boats have double or triple the windage of sailboats when docking and, as we mention in #4, most power boaters ignore the wind. The above picture of a sailboat, trawler and motor yacht shows this.

When docking a power boat, the helmsman must “lean the boat into the wind” as if he were going up a steep hill; otherwise, he'll find himself in his downwind neighbor's slip, instead of his own.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

3. Wind Effect—Little vs Lots

Because of the giant keel and rudder on sailboats, the wind affects them far less when idling into a slip, keeping them on track with where the boat is aimed.

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Power boats with their toboggan-like bottoms have no lateral resistance to prevent them from sliding sideways with the wind. Power boats need different techniques to counter the wind than sailboats.

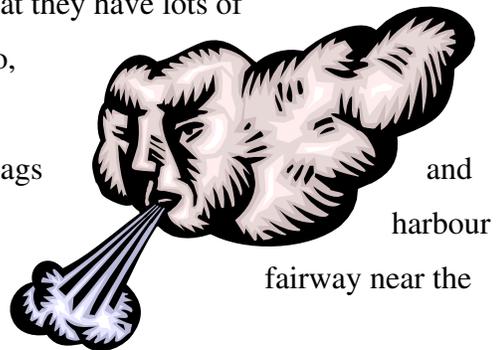
Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

4. Wind Awareness—Full vs None

Sailors are always aware of the wind direction and wind strength, for obvious reasons. Handling a sailboat depends on it, so sailors read lots and take sailing lessons to learn how to handle and dock their boats. At the same time, they learn all the nautical terminology.

Conversely, most power boaters “couldn't care less” about the wind direction and strength when handling their boats. They believe that they have lots of horse power and can steer wherever they want to go, regardless of the wind.

They don't read the wind by watching for flags and pennants close to the slip or the ripples on the water and how it affects the boat when stopped in the slip or allow for drifting room.



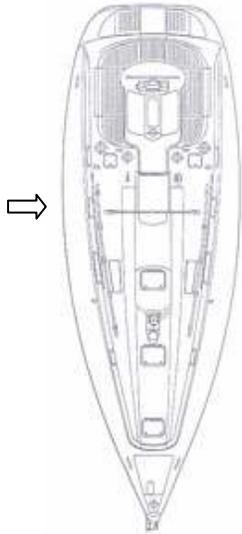
So, many power boaters get themselves into trouble when approaching their docks, because they aren't aware of the wind direction. They get blown sideways then scratch their heads saying “How did that happen?”

That's why power boaters need docking instructions that take into consideration the wind direction and the affect it has on their boats.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

5. Deck Shape —Banana vs Triangle

At deck level, mono-hull sailboats are shaped more like a banana, which makes stepping off amidships and tying easy from the amidships shroud.



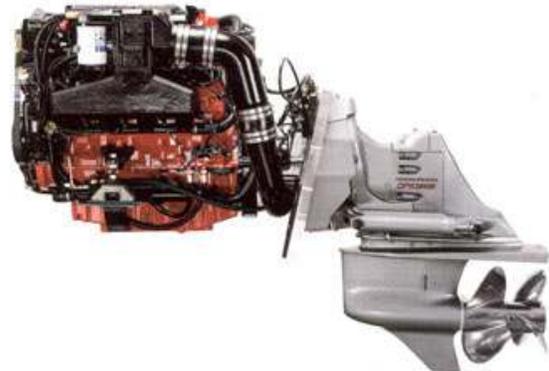
Power boats are shaped more like a triangle, making it nearly impossible to leap over the bow rail, across and down to the dock.



Because of this shape difference, different docking techniques are required for power boats. *Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.*

6. Horsepower and Propeller Size—Small vs Large

Most sailboats have minimal reverse which means no or poor brakes because of their small propellers or folding props that sometimes fail to open. As a result, sailors have learned to compensate by using the amidships line as a brake or approaching the dock at dead slow speed.



For power boats, the opposite is true. They need to come in with enough speed to prevent sideways drift, so the boat maintains the intended course, then use their horsepower and big propeller(s) to slam on the brakes.

These differences require a different procedure than the out dated instructions from the 30's, 40's and 50s.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

7. Side Deck – Wide vs Narrow

Sailboats are built to accommodate walking down the side deck to attend to the sails and rigging usually with lifelines for easy and safe moving about.



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Many power boats today do not have a side deck, so maneuvering from the stern to the bow to access the bow line or anchor must be done through the hatch, or over/through the windshield to a usually steep slippery foredeck often with no hand holds. Others have a side deck that is so narrow, it is almost impossible to walk on, but with hand holds it is doable.

Without a side deck, docking becomes very difficult when you follow the outdated instructions intended for sailboats. These power boats need entirely different docking techniques.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

8. Freeboard—Low vs High

In the last few decades, because of extreme water level fluctuations, many



marinas are using low floating docks.

The height differential from the low freeboard of the sailboat to the high freeboard of most cruisers, yachts and trawlers, makes stepping off the side deck of a sailboat much easier.

e-Lesson #31 Why Power Boat Docking is Difficult

The crew on a power boat would require bionics, because it is too high and too far.

As wonderful as power boat First Mates are, they aren't bionic to leap the distances required by the outdated docking instructions when applied to today's power boats.



Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

9. Swim Platform—None vs Wide

Sailboats don't have swim platforms—until recently. But, even now, the swim platform isn't used for docking—just swimming and boarding the dinghy. The side decks on sailboats still make docking easier from amidships.



Power boats have easy access to the dock (especially floating docks) from the swim platforms, which were invented decades after most instructions were written.

Taking advantage of the swim platform using techniques specific to this style of power boat, makes docking much easier.

It certainly makes easy simple application of our FLIPP Line™ procedure for a safer, easier docking.



Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

10. First Dock Line—Bow vs Stern

Most of the outdated docking instructions require the First Mate to throw the spring line or the bow line 30 feet or 40 feet to a dock helper.

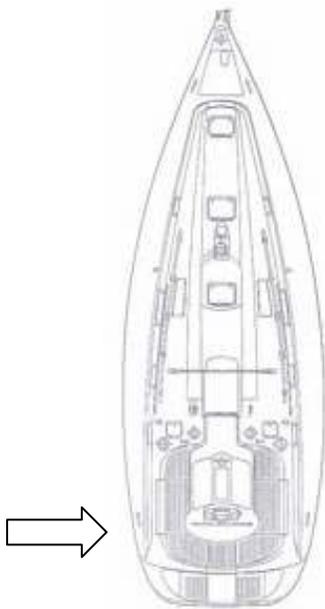
If there isn't a dock helper present (and there usually isn't) these instructions imply that the First Mate should throw that 30 foot-40 foot line, then it should magically wrap itself around the cleat or post, then boomerang back to her hand. This is a feat that I have never seen accomplished by a woman or a man.

Power boat First Mates on the bow, are usually too high above the dock to nail a cleat and there isn't always a dock helper there. If there is, the dock helper usually doesn't know how to do what is required or doesn't understand the docking plan. Without a competent dock helper, these old instructions are useless.

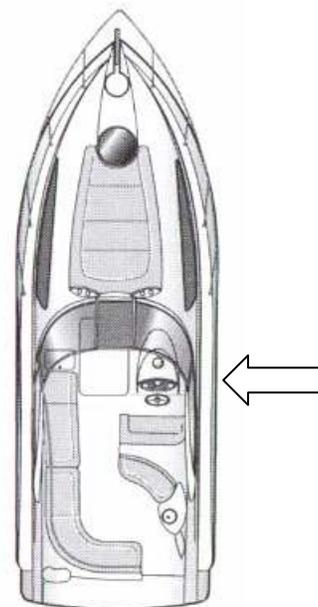
Today's power boats (except for houseboats) dock far better attaching the stern line first from the swim platform or the cockpit.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

11. Helm Position—Aft vs Mid



Sailboat helms are almost always on the centre line and always closer to the transom. The helmsman can see the whole boat deck and sheerline as well as the space to the dock, so the “rifle vs pistol” effect is in play. Being on the centre line of the boat gives him a balanced view of the boat slip ahead. Everything is equal both sides of the centerline.



On a power boat, the helm is at the forward end of the cockpit approximately one third to halfway forward depending on the boat brand; whereas houseboats, bow riders and cuddies are even further forward—closer to two thirds from the transom. These helm positions make

e-Lesson #31 Why Power Boat Docking is Difficult

aiming the power boat at the dock more difficult, because you are docking a short pistol rather than a long rifle and you are ahead of the pivot point instead of behind it.

On almost all power boats, the helm is off the centre line—usually hard to starboard which puts the driver well off the centre line. So, combining the two, the power boat helmsman is really handicapped by driving from well forward with less boat ahead of him for reference plus he is way off the centre line.

Also on many power boats, the superstructure doesn't allow the captain to see the transom corners from the helm. With this restricted visibility when docking, it becomes even more difficult and different techniques are required.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

12. Helm Operation—Stand vs Sit

Sailboat helms are in the cockpit and lend themselves to standing during docking,



which gives the captain improved visibility of the deck, space to the dock, and the dock. He can see directly with no guesswork.

On many powerboat helms, low canvas is snapped to the windshield, or the helm seat is not moveable, which forces the driver to remain seated during docking. These or other confinements reduce his view of the space left before the bow hits the dock. These helm setups force the driver to estimate the distance remaining. They also confine him to the helm area, where he often feels trapped, especially when needed to help fend off or throw a line.



Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

13. Personality—Social vs Independent

Most sailors are quite club oriented and involved in club activities and group activities. As a result, the older more experienced sailors share their boating and “how to sail” knowledge with the younger, newer members, including docking techniques.

Most power boaters are more independent, when it comes to boating. Being quite entrepreneurial, they tend to shy away from organized activities such as races, cruises, regular work details, like group/club launch and haul out. Also, many don’t take lessons, they just fumble along on their own. They also don’t learn the nautical terminology that comes with lessons, so you’ll often hear power boaters refer to “parking” their boats instead of docking their boats, or turning “left” or “right” instead of port or starboard.

As a result, each power boater muddles through to eventually learn, or not learn, on his own—how to use his boat, including docking his boat. More proof of this can be found on the boating forums on the internet. The advice given is like “the blind leading the blind”.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today’s power boat drive systems.

14. Crew Involvement—Team vs Solo

On a sailboat, cruising, trimming the sails and tacking up the lake is a team sport that involves several people to sail the boat. During docking, the team naturally stays involved with securing the dock lines.

On a power boat, cruising up the lake is often a solo operation of steering that does not always involve others on board. During docking, the crew has to be requested to switch from their activity to that of docking.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today’s power boat drive systems.

15. Screw-up Index—Little vs Lots

On a sailboat, there is far less to screw up during the last 10 feet before “touch-down”. If the captain does screw-up by turning the wheel the wrong way or hammering it into reverse, the sailboat is only going to stop straight, because of the big keel, small

e-Lesson #31 Why Power Boat Docking is Difficult

propeller and the dead-slow approach. It won't pull the stern into the boat beside him or slam the bow into the dock, because the small propeller doesn't change angle of thrust. It is always aimed fore and aft. Sailboats don't steer in reverse within the length of a slip or from a dead stop.

On a power boat (especially outboards or sterndrives either single or twin), there is lots to screw up during the last 10 feet. It's not the going forward into the slip that is difficult, because you simply aim. It's the stopping and steering in reverse that gets most power boaters into trouble.

Just before the bow touches the dock, the car brain says, "Turn away from the dock so you don't crash and put on the brakes." So, the driver turns the wheel away from the dock and pulls the shift into reverse to stop, expecting the bow to pull out from the dock and the stern to come into the dock.

Instead, the bow hits the dock and the stern hits the neighbor's boat—just the opposite of what the car brain expected. Why? Because when the driver turned the steering wheel, the propeller was turned and aimed away from the dock. The re-aimed reverse thrust, pulled the stern out and pivoted the bow in.

Then, a shot of throttle multiplies the error and the damage. Recovery is always very complicated, because the ego kicks in and the logical brain stops. Docking a power boat is far more complicated and difficult than docking a sailboat or parking a car.

Therefore, the original keel & skeg oriented docking instructions are outdated and do not apply to any of today's power boat drive systems.

Summary

Since most docking instructions were originated in the 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's, they still apply to mono hull sailboats, because the handling characteristics and design of sailboats haven't changed.

Power Boats have changed

Because power boat handling characteristics have changed drastically with the changes in style, bottom design, invention of different drive systems and superstructure, **power boats today require different updated instructions** for handling and docking.

There are only a small percentage of power boaters who can dock their boats well without the need for yelling, swearing, jumping, boat hooks, bionics, dock helpers, guesswork or embarrassment.

When getting a drivers license, you need different instructions to drive a bus, tractor trailer, transport truck, motor home, motor cycle, car, bicycle, snow machine, ATV, 5th wheel etc. Some have front wheel drive, some rear wheel drive, some have all wheel drive or four wheel drive, ABS brakes, etc. They differ in the load they can carry, their weight, stopping distance, acceleration distance, and tenderness. They all handle differently with different design, no of wheels, hp, size, maneuverability, turning radius and, therefore, need different instructions.

The rules of the road are the same, but every type of vehicle handles differently; thus requiring different instruction.

Similarly with boating, **there are different techniques for different types of boats** and different drive systems for runabouts, cuddies, minicruisers, cruisers, yachts, trawlers, houseboats, pontoon boats, performance boats, ski-boats, bass boats, etc. They all have a different turning radius, windage, speeds, stopping distances, helm positions, visibility, style, superstructure, blind spots, drive systems, number of motors, size, weight, maneuverability and dock access.

They all have different handling characteristics and require different handling and docking instructions. “**One size doesn’t fit all**”, so to speak!

So, It’s not your fault if you’ve been having trouble docking your boat using these old, out-dated instructions or even new regurgitation of these old, out-dated instructions.

It’s Not Your Fault!

No new Power Boat Docking Instructions—until now

During our research over several years, we were unable to find any good power boat docking instructions.

No one has written updated easy-to-follow, step-by-step docking instructions for power boats,

taking all the changes of the last several decades into consideration and the effect they have on docking—until now.

Dawsons have created

The Ultimate Power Boat Docking Instructions for each drive system totally from scratch—no regurgitations of old, out-dated information, based on generations of knowledge and decades of first-hand experience to help boaters around the world dock their boats with confidence as a team with their First Mates, eliminating the worry and fear, so they can enjoy docking.

Introductory and Advanced e-Lessons

Because my experience tells me that there is a huge learning curve, I have prepared **Introductory e-Lessons** for each drive system to get boaters started and comfortable with how their boat handles, and how to dock bow first.

Then, when ready, boaters can graduate to the **Advanced level**, often after a full season of boating, to learn techniques for backing into slips, piling slips or gas docks, and many more neat docking maneuvers in all wind conditions with diagrams and pictures to simplify.

You need to learn the introductory first because advanced builds on what you learned in introductory—just like High School, then University.

*Docking is a team sport,
so the Captain and First Mate should learn together.*

The information and techniques, if taught by a qualified on-board instructor would cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars AND you wouldn't have any detailed notes to review and practice. Practice is the key—once you learn the right techniques to practice.

Good Docking Instructors

Pick the right instructor, so you don't waste your hundreds and thousands of dollars. Many docking instructors are now teaching our method of docking. See our report "17 Power Boat Docking Questions to Ask Your Instructor, Before signing up for Docking Lessons"

Even Ship Captains and Ferry Captains are now teaching recreational boaters, using Doug Dawsons' Docking e-Lessons because they know that docking a Ship or Ferry is a whole lot different than docking a recreational boat.

A number of on-board instructors are buying and teaching Dawsons updated and current Power Boat Docking Lessons as teaching aids, because the step-by-step instructions are so easy to follow.

Doug Dawson's Power Boat Docking e-Lessons for today's power boats are an inexpensive investment in your boating skills, boating enjoyment, damage avoidance and SAA (spouse alienation avoidance)!

All Power Boaters can learn to dock

With updated Power Boat Docking Lessons, all boaters can now learn to: Confidently and safely bring their boats into a slip or alongside a dock AND secure it to the dock in any conditions without yelling, swearing, jumping, boat hooks, bionics, dock helpers, guesswork or embarrassment.

Invest in your boating future today!

Buy the right e-Lesson for your power boat drive system. Once you have mastered these techniques and skills, you will be the envy of your boating friends and neighbors. You will exude confidence and you will be able to teach your kids and grandkids. After all, they are captains in training.



Captain Confidence!

Doug's Credentials

- 5th generation in the boat business
- My Dad, Art Dawson, taught me to drive boats as soon as I was tall enough to see over a windshield
- At the family marina, (Dawson's Marina on Lake Simcoe, ON) I sold, drove, demonstrated and docked thousands of boats—power and sail—from 15' to 60' for 30 years.
- As a Sea Scout Master for 10 years, I not only taught them to become good citizens, it also taught them to sail and be safe around the water.
- I have boated all my life on the Great Lakes, The Bahamas, Florida, the US East Coast, Intracoastal Waterway and Ocean for pleasure and to deliver new yachts.
- I have reviewed and tested boats for Canadian Yachting and Power Boating Canada Magazine for over 20 years.
- As a hired Captain, I have demonstrated yachts to international dealers and media, for yacht manufacturers during their dealer meetings.
- I Organized Boat Shows and Poker Runs for decades.
- I have taught thousands of boat owners on their boats “hands-on” how to drive and dock—all sizes and types of boats—power and sail.

Dawsons e-Lessons

Dawsons e-Lessons are available at www.BoatingWithDawsons.com. You may also find that some of the other e-Lessons would be helpful for you and your First Mate.

- Docking your Single Outboard O/B – Introductory
- Docking your Single Outboard O/B - Advanced
- Docking your Single Sterndrive I/O – Introductory
- Docking your Single Sterndrive I/O - Advanced
- Docking your Single Inboard I/B - Introductory
- Docking your Twin Outboard O/B – Introductory
- Docking your Twin Outboard O/B - Advanced
- Docking your Twin Sterndrive I/O – Introductory
- Docking your Twin Sterndrive I/O - Advanced
- Docking your Twin Inboard I/B – Introductory

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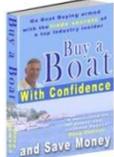
- Docking your Twin Inboard I/B – Advanced
- Docking Your Single I/O & O/B Houseboat
- Docking Your Twin I/O & O/B Houseboat
- Docking Your Twin I/B Houseboat
- Docking your Sailboat
- Anchoring Your Boat
- Communicating Aboard
- Conquering Wakes
- Docking While Cruising
- Enhancing Your Boat
- Enjoying Your Dinghy
- Making Ropes Into Lines
- Ramping Your Boat
- Tying Your Boat
- Tying and Using Knots

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