Owning a Shrimper – Beginners Notes

By Mike Shearman, Shrimper 815 (*Triplet*) (2009)

If you want expert advice, don't look here – ask some experienced owners - or look in The Shrimper Manual by Cornish Crabbers, back issues of The Shrimper, the Shrimper website and reputable sailing publications.

These are just some very personal notes about issues which came up in my first two years of owning a Shrimper. They are listed in alphabetical order for ease of reference.

Anchor
The standard issue on my boat is a CQR type. It fits neatly into the anchor well and seems to work in most situations. However, you never know when you may need to rely on some extra holding power to keep you out of trouble, and any boat which is used for cruising should carry at least two anchors. A new owner is often faced with making a choice out of a considerable array of possible candidates. There is an interesting article in Sailing Today November 2009 which describes some modern anchors which bury themselves into sand to provide very high levels of holding power per kg in weight. However, some of these did not seem to work so well in gravel.
My own personal choice is a Delta, but oversized, and with 10 metres of chain. The one I chose is 6kg and according to the Lewmar Delta table is for boats of 6 to 9.2m. Whatever you choose, the advice seems to be to go for the genuine article and not a copy.

Antifouling
I know some people who swear by Coppercoat which does not need to be re-applied each year. For the first application you have to strip off all existing paint back to the bare hull. This can be done professionally using a wet blasting technique - see Technical section of Shrimper website). In Poole Harbour I have had good results with Blakes Tiger Extra, which can be applied over existing coatings and up to 3 months before launching.

Batteries
If you have an inboard a good battery is vital. Some dedicated 'Marine' batteries are quite expensive. I have found a deep cycle sealed battery made by Lucas. It is called The XV Supreme dual purpose leisure and marine battery and comes with a 3 year guarantee. I got mine on e-bay for just under £70 including delivery.

Berths
At the end of my very first day's sail from Cowes to Yarmouth I looked at the shape of the berths and concluded that the idea must be to sleep with your head in the tunnel under the cockpit seat along with the fire extinguisher. Having celebrated earlier with a few drams, I did sleep, but I have never chosen to repeat this experience. I now have the mattresses the other way round with the wide end to the bow. At night I rig up some bits of plywood to prop up the mattress at the top end. These can be slid under the mattress when not in use. Some people make proper mattress extensions.

Burgee Halyard
On my boat the masthead is cluttered up with lights and the aerial. Some organisations ask members to fly burgees from the masthead or crosstrees on the starboard side. Curiously the standard arrangement on the Shrimper is on the port side. Two extra holes in the truck can solve this one. I once let go of my burgee halyard in a very stiff breeze. It very swiftly went horizontal, up level with truck. When I came back a week later it was wrapped at least twenty times round the top of the mast and jib. It took a while to sort that one out. I am considering using a small fishing weight permanently fixed to the halyard.

Centre Plate Wire
Whichever you choose – standard stainless steel or Dyneema - it is much easier to replace with the plate up and before the wire breaks. I would suggest replacement every year. The cost of the material is minimal in comparison with the inconvenience of having a break at an awkward moment. Mine was motoring up a very shallow channel at the end of the day with supper waiting at the top of the creek. Luckily friends were at hand and who knew exactly what to do.
The most vulnerable point in the system is where the wire exits the top of the plate. There is a lot of bending and chafing here as the plate goes up and down.
If you go for wire the biggest difficulty is getting a splayed end up the hole in the plate. As soon as you unwrap your new wire, de-grease the end and spiral up some very thin plastic insulation tape to stop it all fanning out. Remember that it has to go up a hole just a tiny bit bigger than the wire - so not too many turns – then carry on with the tape round some thin copper wire to lead up through the hole. If you are intending to keep a spare, have it taped and ready to go in your spares box. Do not leave it until you have a break. By that time it may have splayed out irretrievably. Gaffer tape is likely to be too thick and sticky. Cornish Crabbers supply the wires by mail order.
3mm Dyneema is much easier as you can stiffen the end, poke it down from the top, and put a knot in it.
If you do get an unexpected break, the only way to get the plate up is by beaching – preferably on a hard surface. We did it on a slipway, with some people pulling and lifting the bowsprit and some others sitting in the stern.
Fiddling about with ropes under the boat is not at all likely to work.

Checklists
It is very easy to forget things when you are anxious to get out sailing or back in to get home. Everyone's checklist will be different but this is what I consider to be the minimum: engine seacock, grease stern gland, electrical isolator, centreplate, rudder, boom restraint, jib tie, halyard tie, red ensign, burgee, cockpit cushions, locks.

Clew Outhaul
The clew outhaul, along with the halyards is adjusted to alter the shape of the sail. Some owners have put in additional blocks at the end of the boom to improve purchase and some run the line to blocks on the mast and back to the cockpit to make it even easier to control. I am considering using large stainless shackles or small blocks to reduce friction in the lashings and also moving the cam cleat on the boom so that it can be easily reached from the cockpit with the boom partly out.

Cockpit
The Shrimper has a nice big comfortable cockpit. It all works fine until the boat tips up. Unless you are seven or eight feet tall there is not much to brace your feet against. This is why my engine controls look so beaten up. I have recently made an H shaped frame out of ex 50x38 planed softwood with the horizontal of the H running fore and aft at the centre of the cockpit. This just sits in the bottom of the cockpit and makes a good footrest.

Engine
I am not going to deal with outboards here – they are all different and have their own manuals. The Yanmar 1GM10 is another matter – the manual I was given has very little information. It is probably best to have an inboard professionally serviced each winter before it gets too cold – to avoid freezing the cooling water. The main things to look out for are the exhaust manifold and the engine oil pipe, both of which are subject to corrosion and can cause very severe engine problems if they leak - see technical section of Shrimper website.
Cooling water circulation is also very important and needs to be checked every time the engine is started. I had some cooling water problems and initially thought it was a problem with the impeller.
Changing the impeller is a real pain due to its location. If you have a Speedseal cover the plate is held on with three knurled bolts. Two of these fit into slots in the cover and one through a hole. If you are careful you can leave the most awkwardly positioned bolt in place. Look out for the very thin O ring in the cover and keep a spare – it can fall into the bilges. Check the manual for the direction of the blades and grease the impeller before putting it in. If you have the right level of dexterity you will be able to grasp the greasy impeller with all of the blades pointing the right way and insert it with the flat on the impeller lined up with the flat on the shaft, all the while stretched out in the bottom of the boat with your hand thrust through a very small aperture. On the other hand, if you are like me you will look for another way.
I would suggest finding a plastic cylinder like an aspirin or old fashioned film container, so long as it is just a bit smaller than the hole that the impeller has to go into. Cut it to form a cylinder about 30mm high. You can then use it to sort out the blades into the correct configuration inside the cylinder before you push it, with the impeller inside, into the pump. You can then sort out the problem of the flats, hold in the impeller with a finger, and withdraw the cylinder. If your cylinder is not quite the right size, try splitting it lengthwise and adjusting the diameter with a Jubilee hose clip.
Eventually I found out that something – weed or encrusted salt – had blocked the flow in the engine. I got it out by taking off the rubber hoses and poking a stiff wire into the metal pipes. The first one I tried was the one from the sea water inlet into the engine. A very gentle prod produced a satisfying gush of water down from above as I had been pouring fresh water into the system earlier. It is worth checking and if necessary replacing the strainer in the salt water inlet. Obviously the sea cock has to be closed before doing anything to the cooling water system.

Gaff Lacing
I came across an article on Shrimper sails in the May 2009 edition of Sailing Today. Apparently Chris Jeckells recommends spiral lacing for the gaff rather than the marling hitches described in the Shrimper manual. Also the lacing should not be very tight. I have tried it and the edge of sail looked quite smooth.

Foghorn
It is probably a good idea to carry a mouth operated foghorn. The aerosol ones can rust or run out.

Halyards
Some people use hemp style ropes and cleats while others may prefer nylon braid and clutches - with lots of variations in between. I understand that Lewmar clutches are easier to adjust under load, which is useful on a gaff rigged boat where you may be adjusting the rig to suit wind conditions. Threading ropes through clutches can be difficult. One way is to spiral insulation tape onto a thin leader. Canvas halyard bags can help to keep the cockpit tidy.

Jib
A UV resistant strip can prolong the life of your jib and save you money in the long run. Check the height of your jib from the deck as this can affect the angle of the sheets and the set of the sail. I had to lower mine a bit. Using cord lashings onto the furling system instead of shackles can make these adjustments easier to do.

Lifejackets
As a minimum I would go for lots of buoyancy, a sprayhood, light, whistle, crotch strap, and harness. I also have some safety lines to fix to the harness. The lifejacket could be your only chance of survival, especially if you do not have a liferaft.

Mooring
The Shrimper manual has a very detailed diagram on how to attach your boat to a mooring buoy. The intention is to avoid strain on the bobstay. I am not sure that I have ever seen it done this way. Take a look at other boats around you and make your own decision.

Reeds Almanac
I always go for the spiral bound one. It has very good harbour plans (these are not in the Small Craft edition) and folds flat so you can read it.

Reefing
My boat was fitted with hooks at the forward end of the boom for the forward reefing eyes. You can buy these off the peg at a chandler. If you use this method it can be useful to mark the throat halyard at the cleat or clutch at the points where the eyes can be put on the hooks.

Radio
Some marinas and clubs use channel 37. If you do not seem to have this channel on your radio you may find that M1 is the same thing. If you buy a handheld it is worth having one which is submersible. You could be in the drink when you need to use it.

Single handed sailing
If you do not have an electronic Tiller Pilot fitted it can be useful to have a device to hold the tiller while you are doing something else. One is called Tiller Tamer. There is also the Tiller-hand. Mine is fitted under the tiller to avoid getting tangled up with the tiller extension and mainsheet.

Single handed mooring
One method is to balance on the foredeck with a boathook while the boat cleverly steers itself up to the buoy. Another way is to fix a large snap hook to a line and run the line from the cockpit, outside the starboard shrouds and sheets, through the bow roller and then directly back to the cockpit. This end should be fixed to something strong in case things go wrong. You then approach the buoy, lean over the side from the cockpit, and fix on the snap hook. You then pull the other end of rope through the bow roller until the buoy is somewhere near the bow. Then the buoy can be hauled up at the bow and the mooring can be secured as normal. At least this way you should not be in too much danger of hitting adjacent boats. I have succeeded with this method under motor, sail, and running under bare poles.
If you are going for a pontoon berth single handed, have the bow and stern lines fixed and ready to hand, but secure the boat to the pontoon from amidships before you go leaping ashore with them.

Spares
Useful spares: impeller, impeller cover gasket or O ring, centre plate wire, shackles, snap shackles, carbine hooks, clevis pins, bits of wire, torches, and tools for everything. Thin Dyneema can be used as lashings to temporarily repair all sorts of broken bits - including bottle screws and shackles.

Stern gland greaser
I did not get on with the standard stern gland greaser. I found it hard to work out how many turns I was giving it, and I got fed up with filling it up with grease all the time. Chandlers such as Force 4 or Gael Force will sell you a good big brass one with a nice tap handle at the top which lasts for ages between fills. They also sell the plastic pipe and fittings. With plastic pipe you must have the brass olives that go inside the pipe as well as outside, otherwise the pipe can be compressed and snap off.

Tenders
Some people manage to fit proper tenders inside the boat or in one of the stern lockers, but I have found that mine is quite bulky and there is very little room on deck for blowing one up. So for occasional use I bought a two man Sevylor inflatable kayak. The advantage is that you can blow it up with one end in the cabin and the other in the cockpit. Rolled up in a bag it is quite small and fits in next to the centre board casing or under the cockpit seat.

Varnish
For spars and other external woodwork a lot of people seem to use Sikkens Cetol.
I am not sure if it should be used on Teak but it seems to work well on softwood and plywood.