

Owning a Shrimper – Beginners Notes - Revised 2015

By Mike Shearman (Shrimper 815 Triplet)

I originally wrote these notes after just two years of owning a Shrimper. Five years on I have made some revisions. I have to say that some parts of the original are now out of date, I have changed my mind about some, and some were probably wrong in the first place.

If you want detailed 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 Technical and Forum sections and reputable sailing publications.

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

Anchor

The standard anchor for the Shrimper is the CQR. It fits neatly into the anchor well and seems to work in most situations. However, my own CQR once let me down very badly indeed, and this prompted me to take a much keener interest in the subject. I found that practical tests of anchors currently available have revealed some surprising variations in performance. For example, the 7kg CQR has just over one third of the holding capacity of a 5.1kg Spade. Some of these results are to be found in articles in Sailing Today November 2009 and Practical Boat Owner August 2011, both of which came up with very similar findings. I have summarised these in a separate article, but for the record I currently have a 6kg Rocna in the anchor well and a folding aluminium Fortress in the cabin.

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) or by ice blasting. 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. Five years on I am still using the same stuff, but it is now called Hempel Tiger Extra.

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. This battery is still going strong. I have been advised that batteries last much longer if they are kept topped up. To do this I have small, cheap, (Maplins) solar panel which I lay flat in the cockpit when I am not on board. So far, it has not been blown away or stolen.

Berths

At the end of my very first day's sail from Cowes to Yarmouth I looked at the shape of the berths and surmised 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

Some organisations ask members to fly burgees from the masthead or crossrees 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 currently have a small snap shackle on the halyard to stop this happening.

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. If the wire does break, and the plate goes down with a bang, it can damage the casing, particularly around the pivot bolt. Similarly, always put a knot in the control rope to stop the plate going right to the bottom. I would suggest checking carefully every year and replacing every other 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 points in the system are where the wire exits the top of the plate and down to the first few turns round the spindle. 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 probably much easier as you can stiffen the end, poke it down from the top, and put a knot in it, but I must admit that I have not tried it yet.

If you do get an unexpected break, the easiest 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.

Some owners have had success with ropes or ratchet webbing straps fed under the boat.

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. In some situations this can reduce weather helm. I have put in additional blocks at the end of the boom to improve purchase and run the line to blocks on the mast and back to the cockpit to make it even easier to control.

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. I have since tried using two horizontals closer to the sides of the cockpit – which suits me better.

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 pipes, both of which are subject to corrosion and can cause very severe engine

problems if they leak - see technical section of Shrimper website. I have mine checked professionally every other year.

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 35mm film container, so long as it is about the size of 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 line up the flats, push in the impeller with a finger, and withdraw the cylinder. If your cylinder is not quite the right size, try splitting it lengthwise to adjust the diameter, possibly with a slight taper, and hold it together with insulation tape or a Jubilee hose clip. Alternatively some people use a Jubilee clip on its own and some use a cable tie.

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.

Fuel

I have heard of several instances where owners have had diesel bug in their fuel tanks. This can be dangerous if it causes engine failure and it can be expensive to have a tank cleaned out. Apparently the problem is worse if there is bio diesel in the fuel, and this means most diesel that you buy these days. I would advise the use of a fuel additive every time you fill up. Fuel Set disperses water in the fuel and includes biocides. It came out well in some recent tests and I have not had any problems since I started using it. It costs about 1p per litre of fuel. In the winter it is best to keep tanks filled right up to reduce the risk of condensation.

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 this, and I must say that the lie of the 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 as pushing braided rope tends to make it go thicker. One way is to spiral insulation tape onto a thin leader. I currently have 8mm halyards and have found that they are easier to thread. 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 connect the harness to the boat. The lifejacket could be your only chance of survival, especially if you do not have a liferaft. There are lots of makes to choose from but I have noticed that over the years the RNLI have tended to go for Crewsaver. Keith Thatcher has reminded me that lifejackets should be checked regularly and that the auto inflation mechanisms on the cartridges deteriorate over time. They are marked with a use-by date and should be replaced before this expires.

Mooring

The Shrimper manual has a very detailed diagram on how to attach your boat to a mooring buoy. The method shown involves leaning over the bow to fix a line to the bobstay eye. The intention is to avoid strain on the bobstay when the boat swings. Opinions vary on this. I am not sure that I have ever seen it done exactly as per the book. Take a look at other boats around you and make your own decision.

Raising and Lowering the Mast

This subject is well covered in the Shrimper Manual and the Website Technical Section and Forum but I would like to pass on a couple of comments about doing the job single handed. The main issue is getting a good angle on the lifting line when the mast is nearly horizontal. New Shrimpers are fitted with hinged bowsprits, and this is probably the best way. A much cheaper (albeit inferior) alternative is to make a simple crutch out of two lengths of wood hinged with a single bolt near the top.

This can be jammed into the anchor well with a guy out to the bowsprit to stop it falling over. To avoid the risk of damage to the reefing spar when doing this I temporarily replace it with a warp about the same length between the jib halyard and the end of the bowsprit.

I have found that the jib halyard, which runs from a block to one side of the mast, tends to pull the mast sideways. To avoid this happening I shackle a block to the end of the bowsprit and run the halyard from there to the winch. This has the added advantage of being an extra pull in the right direction rather than sideways.

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. After a fair bit of experiment and discussion with other owners we have found that a good method is have the device on top of the tiller behind the tiller extension clip with the lines running forward to two small blocks roughly in line with the standard tiller cord fairleads that come with

the boat. This way there is good leverage on the tiller and the device is not in the way of anything.

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 falling off or 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. Ramanol Advanced Grease is not the cheapest, but since using it I have not had any water coming in through the stern gland.

Varnish

For spars and other external woodwork a lot of people seem to use Sikken's Cetol – see Shrimper Forum on this.

I am fairly certain that Sikken's is less likely to entrap moisture than varnish and I am sticking with it.