

Training Notes: 1 - Steering Kildare on Cross straps

by Neil Ratcliffe

Steering Kildare can be a very pleasurable experience, it is very peaceful and you can actually hold conversations with people on the towpath or on passing boats. If the steerer of 'President' has ever upset you, now is the time that you can get your revenge, you can make his/her job easier or harder depending on how much you do or don't do. If you haven't tried it before, try moving the stern of Kildare around when you are travelling on a straight section of canal, and see the effect that this has on President. Please let the steerer know that you are going to do it though as he may be about to do something else.

On straight sections try and keep Kildare's stern in the centre of the canal and in line with President, but if the steerer attention has wandered and he/she is taking the scenic route then stay in the middle. However the position of trees, branches and other boats will make alterations to this necessary.

Approaching bridge holes, line the stern up with the route that you wish to take, Presidents steerer will take care of the front end, as long as the cross straps are connected correctly. If they aren't then you will have to make adjustments to avoid hitting the bridge arch or towpath.

On bends you can help the 'President' negotiate the way round by steering in the opposite direction to him/her, but don't overdo it. This can take time to get used to if you have only been used to steering single motors. Watch what the 'President' is doing with the tiller, if he/she is only making minor movements then there is no need for your to help. If you see him/her push the tiller hard over then steer in the opposite direction. This will move the bows of Kildare towards the outside of the bend, and as it is attached to the stern of 'President' it will push that in the same direction thereby helping the boat round the bend.

To be able to help in this way, Kildare has to be in the right position. It is no good if Kildare is too close to the bank on what will be the inside of the bend as there will be no room for you to steer. So when approaching a left hand bend position the stern of Kildare slightly to the right of centre of the canal, this will give the necessary room for you to be able to help if needed. Do this positioning slowly as you approach the bend. As before, trees and other boats may make this more difficult to achieve.

On sharper bends and at junctions the 'President' will sometimes disconnect one of the cross straps to allow a tighter angle between motor and butty. It should be indicated to you when this happens. When it does try to make sure that the bows of Kildare are on the outside of the bend in relation to the stern of President, otherwise it may get trapped between the stern and fenders and not be of any help in negotiating the bend.

Whilst enjoying the peace and the scenery, make sure that you keep an eye on the 'President' in case he/she wants you to steer in one direction or another, he/she is 70 feet in front of you and will have a better view of what is happening. Also be ready to warn other crew members

of approaching branches and bridges etc. in case they hadn't noticed them, especially if they are considering walking the top plank.

In windy conditions keep a look ahead to see where cross winds will affect you, gaps in the hedge will show up as a rough surface to the water and will give you notice that you may be blown sideways.

It is always better if you know the stretch of canal that you are travelling on but if you don't, try and have a map, or guide with you, so that you have some idea of what to expect. There will always be unexpected things happening, some good and some not so good, but please try to enjoy and learn from all of your experiences.

Neil Ratcliffe