

# Training Notes: 3 - Kildare & wide locks

by Neil Ratcliffe

The last two articles have been about being towed on cross straps and getting Kildare through narrow locks, so this one should complete the series and cover wide locks.

If members of the crew have got off the boats and gone ahead to get the lock ready, then when the boats arrive the gates should be open. President's steerer will decide which side of the lock that President is going to go and then unhook the appropriate cross strap, and then indicate to the steerer of Kildare that the strap has been removed and which side of the lock to take. The removal of the cross strap will make the bows of Kildare move to the correct side anyway so you will know if the steerer forgets to indicate.

Once you know which side of the lock that you are going into, make sure that the breast strap (the one attached to the shackle on the side) is actually on the right side to pass to the steerer of President when needed.

At some point as you are approaching the lock (it varies depending on the steerer of President), the remaining cross strap will be unhooked. You should then receive another signal to show that this has happened. You are now on your own and your aim is to get Kildare neatly into the lock along side President.

As you come alongside the stern of President, hand the checking strap to the steerer so that they can slow down your forward momentum in relation to President. 'President's steerer may ask you to attach the breasting strap, that is threaded through the shackle on President, by looping both ends over the hook on the side of Kildare.'

Hopefully this will happen before you reach the far end of the lock. You then remove the tiller from the rudder stock and place it on the cabin roof, and pull the rudder round to the same side that President is on and secure. If you are able, you can then get off the boat and help with the lock operation.

If this is a single lock or the last one of the flight then you should be back in position before the boats are separated. Leave the rudder pulled round until you are sure that Kildare will not drift back to the end of the lock. When ready, loosen off the rudder and then replace the tiller in the rudder stock and be ready to steer to the side to pick up the remaining crew.

Whilst the boats are in the lock they are under the control of the driver but he is not always in the best position to see what is happening, so it is up to all crew to be aware of possible problems, like drifting back on to the cill if going downhill, or anything catching on the gates if going uphill.

One thing to be aware of, when the boats are breasted up and going down in a lock, is the line joining the T studs at the front of the boats. If this line is too slack it will allow the bows of the boats to slide too far along the gates and there is a risk of it catching on the pointed part of the mitre. This point is removed on a lot of gates, but please be aware of this risk.

It is a joy to watch a well handled pair negotiate a wide lock, but mistakes will inevitably happen. As long as things are not attempted too quickly then you have more time to try and rectify these mistakes, and if you can't then the bumps are not as severe.

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