

## Inland Waterways News

### Driving on the canal

*Canal driving can pose its own challenges, so here is a collection of tips from old hands including John Thompson, Duncan Cremin, Pat Flynn, Eoin O'Brolchain and Stuart McNamara. Lock operation is not covered.*

The most important tip is to keep your speed down. The limit is 4mph and, if you try to go faster, you'll just drag bottom. Relax. Chill. Watch the scenery and the birds. Chat to the walkers as they overtake you. Watch your wash: a small wash is enough to damage the bank.



**A hazard you don't often find on the lakes:  
ice on the Grand Canal**

Weed can be a problem in two ways: it can entangle your prop (less of a problem early in the season) or it can block the raw water intake to your engine. Keep a close watch on your temperature gauge and have some way of clearing the pipes.

*You can usually hear/feel when something gets caught on the prop. When this happens, immediately give the engine a quick blast of reverse and this will often clear the object as you effectively unwind it from your prop.*

### Mooring and unmooring

Keep your stern, with its vulnerable prop and rudder, off the bank:

*The canal is generally too shallow to get your stern to the bank, and it's not unusual to find rocks in the canal.*

Get the bow in and a crew member ashore, who can then gently pull the stern alongside. You will often need a gangplank. The jetties above and below locks are only for when using the lock.

To get off the bank (assuming it's a soft bank with no rocks), get the bow hard in with the boat at about 45 degrees to the bank, then reverse out beyond the centre of the canal before going into forward and straightening up. If you don't get the stern far enough out, it may hit the bank when you go forward. Another approach is to use the bow- or stern-thruster (AKA the long pole).

### Turning

Assuming you want to turn 180 degrees, find a soft piece of bank, with no rocks, where the canal is wide enough for your boat to turn. Drive the nose of the boat on to the bank slowly, with the wheel hard over. Make sure you have enough deep water behind you for the stern to swing without damaging the prop.

## Keeping straight

*If you start veering off to one side of the canal, it can be surprisingly difficult to get back on track as the bow swings from one side to another.*

*We used to call it an "attack of the bends" as you end up veering all over the place (and there ain't a lot of room to veer). It is a symptom of bank effect (or venturi effect for any scientists or engineers out there). The easiest way to get out of it is to simply slow down, as the slower the water flowing beside you, the less the effect.*

*Bank effect: if the boat goes too close to the bank or another boat, or too fast when going past, the water between them is displaced, causing a suction zone between them. This can happen between a long boat and the bank or even another boat. The degree of suction is related to the length of boat and the speed.*

## Dropping off crew at a lock

*Just nose in, let the crew off over the bow, then back off and hang about in midstream until the lock is ready.*

*Alternatively, use the jetties, as nearly all locks have them.*

*I reckon the jetties are more trouble than they're worth for cruisers: driver then has a boat alongside a hard, low jetty, possibly with a sharp edge at the handrail. On a family boat, half the adult crew may be gone (to operate the lock), leaving the driver with a much harder job to get off without scraping the boat. It's different for metal boats.*

## Entering a lock

Enter slowly, with plenty of fenders at different levels just in case. Some locks near Dublin fill very full and you need crew ashore to hold the boat off the top of the wall to protect the bilges.

*All cills of locks should be crossed with the engine in neutral where possible. If you have power on, it can stir up the bottom and the next thing is that the gates don't close properly. Particularly noticeable in built up areas like Dublin and Tullamore, where there tends to be more junk in the canal to get stirred up.*

Keep away from the two ends of the lock: make sure your stern doesn't get hung up on the cill going down and your bow doesn't get caught on the gate or the foot-boards. Going up, make sure you don't get either end caught on a gate.

## Bridges

In general, no problem unless you have high air draft, in which case you'll have to keep an eye on the inner curves. In urban areas, it is often wise to slow down when approaching bridges because of the possibility of running into traffic cones and whatnot.

Chris Deuchar (in ***A Boater's Guide to Boating***, for the Historic Narrow Boat Owners Club) describes how English narrowboats approached bridges:

*Traditionally also, you went steaming up to bridgeholes, reduced the engine revs as the bows entered the bridge, allowed your following swell to lift the stern of the boat and then blatted off again as the engine and back cabin went through. This reduced the suction on the underwater bridge pointing, made one less likely to hit bottom and added to the general interest of boating.*

## Meeting other boats and passing moored boats

The canal is wide enough for two M-boats to pass, but slow down because of the bank effect. A passing boat can cause a moored boat to pull its mooring pins out of the bank.