

TOWING

Paul Tara, 2014

Towing is an activity that is often associated with small sailing dinghies. Since dinghies are unballasted, their behavior under tow is greatly influenced by their rigs, and their human ballast, or lack thereof. Every design has its own stability curve. Some will lie untended at a mooring, while others will flip at the dock unless watched closely. *Know the boats you're dealing with.*

Basic Principles:

- **Avoid knots.** Whenever possible, towlines should be snubbed and hand-held, so they can be released quickly even under strain. Individual painters should be long enough to permit this or doubling (1.5 – 2 boat lengths).
- **Board Up.** If a boat yaws relative to the tow with its board full down, it can “trip” over it and capsize. A small amount left exposed (6”) will facilitate steering control.
- **Accurate steering by all parties is important.** Sloppiness and inattention result in unnecessary collisions and can endanger the entire tow, including the chase boat.
- **Always allow dinghies to swing into the wind.** NEVER attempt to control any dinghy by grabbing the boom.

Methods:

- **Side Tow:** Useful for short-haul snatch and grabs, in all conditions. In moderate-heavy air side tows can cause the chase boat to ship water. The dinghy should be secured to the chase boat forward of the CLR (the board) either by hand or using the painter. Unmanned boats may be side towed. Rudders can remain shipped, provided the tiller is free, but never attempt towing a boat sternfirst with the rudder on.
- **Stern Tows:**
 1. *Daisy Chains:* Painters are looped and snubbed around the thwart or mast of the boat ahead.
 2. *Towline with Loops:* Preferred for more “sporty” conditions. A buoyant towline with loops spaced approximately every 20’ is

optimal. Each boat doubles its painter through a loop and snubs it around its thwart or mast. Streaming the towline in a circle, like a Lifesling, can facilitate boats picking up the tow.

Conditions:

- **Light Air:** Toro's may be towed alongside or astern in light air and smooth water with their masts stepped and sails hoisted.
- **Moderate Air:** Tow with the mast stepped only if the boats are manned. It is not recommended, but possible to tow manned boats with their sails hoisted, but only upwind. Under no circumstances attempt to tow boats downwind with their sails hoisted once the true wind exceeds two or three knots. The boats will overrun the tow with unfortunate results. *Never tow unmanned boats in these conditions with their masts stepped.* The lack of human ballast will result in capsizes. Rudders and boards should be removed and unstepped masts should be carried forward aboard the chase boat so they will not foul the towlines.
- **Heavy Air:** An unmanned boat may be towed in rough conditions only if the mast is unstepped. The sail should be stowed. The blades should be removed from the boat and all gear securely lashed in place. The trunk must be blocked with a trunk plug or with rags firmly stuffed in the top. If these steps are taken, the dinghy may be towed at speed and will plane handily behind the chase boat. A towing eye low on the forward transom helps to raise the bow.

The above are the basics. As with all seamanship, nothing is in concrete; anticipation and adaptability are the keys. The basic principle to remember is that sailing dinghies are inherently unstable, and become more so when the human ballast is removed. *Just like any good boat, they will relentlessly seek out every opportunity to make a fool out of you.*