

TOWING

No, not getting a tractor to get the car off the beach before the tide covers it but towing fellow paddlers while out on the water. Probably the most epic of all my towing experiences was a tow of several hours when my partner became sick en-route between St Bees and the Isle of Man. I use a body anchored towline of about 10 metres which is attached to a webbing belt (with quick release) around the outside of my buoyancy aid. Thankfully the person I was with was still capable of paddling and staying upright but was lacking power. We towed for several hours in a moderate sea but the sea state built considerably when we neared the Point of Ayre on the Isle of Man. You always learn something in these situations and on this occasion it was that I needed to get a brightly coloured floating line for my tow. Black seemed to be the commonly available 'nice handling' floating line at the time I bought mine but this was hopeless as dusk gave way to darkness. My partner, unable to see the line, snagged it with his paddle when the wave action caused a loop of slack between us. I now have a nice bright yellow line which should help if I am unfortunate enough to be in a similar situation again.

For the business (tow-hook) end of the tow I have a karabiner with a small float secured on the line near to it. The float saves having to reel in yards of line to retrieve the tow-hook if you drop that end of the line in the water. Most recently I use a type of karabiner which has an anodized aluminium frame and a simple wire gate (e.g. 'Wire Lock' from DMM). These seem to be more resistant to the effects of saltwater than the conventional type and are easier to handle and have a wider opening than the stainless steel hooks commonly available from the chandler. You need to be sure that the karabiner can't easily come off the end of your line and disappear into the depths though. When not in use, my hook fits in a little pocket on my buoyancy aid to fall easily to my right hand. I find it useful to dab superglue on the knots in my system (i.e. at each end of the line) otherwise they tend to loosen when the system is stowed for extended periods and come undone when you need to use it!

Of course, there are those who will sing the praises of boat anchored tows which are also fine – I have also tried these in the past. I think my main problem with the design I used was the fiddly-ness of re-deploying my tow after it had been used once and released. If you use a boat anchored tow though, you must, must, must anchor it reasonably close behind the cockpit, otherwise your boat will become very hard to manoeuvre when towing and will be a disaster when in a tandem tow. Tandem tows, particularly a line-astern row of boats each towing the one behind it, can be a very powerful means of towing when in a group, whether using boat or body anchored lines.

I have it in mind to rig a line which could be anchored to boat or body, thereby getting the best of both worlds. Whatever method you settle on, please try it out in a variety of situations to make sure it all works as you expect and that your quick release mechanism is slick.

Graham K Dore, 17-01-03.