

In Feb 2013, what started out as a much-awaited 3-day cruise to one of our local anchorages became an exhausting trial by mid-afternoon. This was our first overnight cruise since we ended our 7-month cruise from FL to MA and back in Oct. We cast off from our home dock in Punta Gorda, FL around 1030 and had to motor south into a light breeze and chop. When we changed course to the WSW, we could motor-sail for an hour before turning south again down the ICW past Punta Blanca Island. Passing the entrance to Pelican Bay, we could see many boats inside, but it was far from being crowded.

As we came abeam the southern end of Punta Blanca, the pucker factor increased as we slowed and watched the depth sounder while hoping to find the 'deep' water channel into the cove on the west side. Having never been in there before, we were especially cautious. We were doing fine until we got to the west side and around a blind turn we came up on a 48 foot motor-yacht that appeared to be aground. Before we could decide whether to stop and reverse course, or go further to the west around him and his anchor chain, we were also aground.

With a southerly wind and northerly current both pushing us onto the shoal, I was not able to power off in reverse as we have so many times in the past. I did know that it was only 1400 and we could expect the tide to rise about another 8 inches or so over the next 6 hours. After shutting down the engine, I lowered the dinghy off the davits and motored to the bow where Diane unstowed the secondary anchor, a large aluminum Fortress, and paid out the rode into the dinghy. I then carefully motored to deeper water abeam and astern and dropped the anchor with about 100 feet of rode.

Back aboard Diva Di, I attached a snatch block to the rode and made the block fast to the midships cleat. With the rode around the primary winch, I could slowly set the anchor and then apply some tension. The slight chop was rocking the boat, and with each movement I could see the bow pivoting slowly around to the southwest. Within 30 minutes, the depth sounder about 10 feet abaft the bow read 6 feet, so I knew we were close to floating free. Only the rudder was still stuck in the sandy mud.

Starting the engine, I was able to use forward thrust and some waggle of the rudder to break free and we were in 7 feet of water. The problem came when Diane could only retrieve the anchor rode part way, and it appeared stuck in the bottom. I summoned her back to the cockpit and told her that she would have to take the helm and try to keep us in the deeper water while I tried to free the anchor. Unfortunately, before I could even make a second attempt, she called out that the engine had stalled. I knew immediately that somehow the slack portion of the anchor rode had found its way around the propeller. It was not a good feeling.

The wind and current slowly pushed us back aground, and we re-evaluated our situation. It was now later in the day, we were aground, had an anchor that was stuck in the bottom, and had a line wrapped around our prop shaft. Diane suggested I call our TowBoatUS service as a precaution, so I did. I was surprised that on a busy Friday with so much boat traffic out, the estimated arrival time was just over a half hour. I didn't expect the TowBoatUS captain to help with the fouled prop problem, so I got out the SCUBA tank and long hose and went under the stern. The wrap was not excessive, but the 5/8 inch nylon had melted itself together between the prop and strut, so I cut it off.

Careful to hold the new bitter end, I bent a spare line to it and had Diane cleat it off. She also retrieved the section of rode attached to the bow and stowed it. With the SCUBA gear secured, I got the anchor rode back on the opposite winch and before long we were free of the bottom. I left the anchor rode attached to the midships cleat and used reverse thrust to keep station in the “deep” channel and within a minute, the towboat arrived, about an hour after I called. I explained the improved situation (we were no longer aground with a fouled propeller), but we had an anchor that we could not easily retrieve from the bottom. I passed the rode to him and we kept clear. He was able to free the anchor easily with his boat and better maneuverability and we agreed to meet back in the ICW where we had comparatively lots of room.

He deployed fenders, came alongside, and passed the anchor to Diane. I took the paperwork and signed it, then thanked him and said goodbye. A half hour later we had approached the main anchorage from the other direction and set the primary anchor. There was a bit of thirst we had to slake at that point, I must say. I definitely enjoyed my ration of vitamin R.

The next day, the wind was strong enough to make dinghy rides very wet and uncomfortable, so I used the time to make a long splice in the anchor rode. I am pretty confident with my splicing of 3-strand line, and since this rode does not have to pass through a windlass, having a beefy splice in the rode is no problem. Through it all, my Admiral remained calm and helpful, and hid her frustrations well. We felt happy with the way we handled the situation, and except for getting the rode wrapped, we worked through the problems quite well.