

HANDLING A CANAL BOAT

You’re on your way on your canal boat! Here’s a few top tips on handling the narrow boat when you’re on the waterways.

Because boats don’t have brakes, you need to give yourself plenty of time to stop – especially when travelling downstream on flowing waters. Ease off the throttle, move into neutral and then use short bursts in reverse gear to slow down and come to a final halt. Remember that it’s more difficult to steer when you’re in reverse gear. You may need an occasional forward boost to get better control.

Steering a boat with a wheel is like steering a car, but it’s more difficult to judge where your wheel should be for going straight ahead. Get to know the feel of the wheel and the rudder position before you set off. Using a tiller to steer is simple – as long as you remember that pushing to the right will make the boat head left and vice versa. Be patient and plan ahead – the boat will take a few seconds to respond.

Your boat pivots from a point about halfway along its length. That means you need to watch out for the front and the back. If you line up the front only and then try to turn into a narrow gap – a bridge or lock, for example – you risk hitting the side with the back of your boat.

GOING AGROUND

Every skipper goes aground at some point – it’s not a disaster. Don’t try to force your way over the obstacle or you’ll find yourself even more stuck. Instead, use reverse gear to back away into deeper water.

If you’re firmly stuck, ask some or all of the crew to move to the side of the boat that’s still floating (but not to the extent that you’d risk capsizing!). Now use the pole to push off against a solid object or the bed of the waterway – if you put the pole straight down and try to use it as a lever, it’ll either break or you’ll fall in. And keep the top of the pole away from your face and body, in case it slips suddenly.

SPECIAL SAFETY TIPS

On a traditional narrowboat, stand inside the hatch so you won’t fall off the small back deck – and watch out for the swing of the tiller

Always be aware of what’s happening around you – on the boat, in the water and on the banks

Don’t let passengers stand or sit in the way of the tiller when you drive a boat

Think ahead and make sure you’re lined up for bridge and lock entrances well in advance

Slow down almost to a stop and carry out all your manoeuvres as slowly as possible.

Don’t forget you can read the full Boating Handbook here

Top tip from customers : “Don’t stress! I was on my first (hope to be many) canal holidays this summer. And unfortunately I saw a lot of holidayboaters stress away their holiday.”