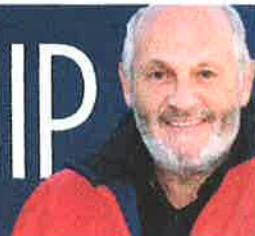
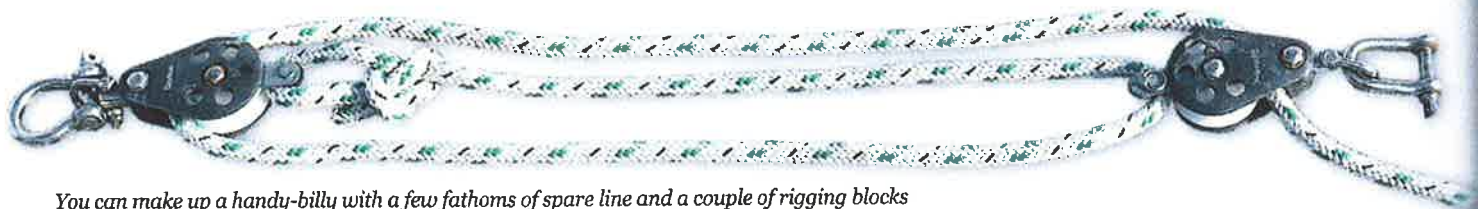


PRACTICAL SEAMANSHIP

Yachting Monthly's news editor Dick Durham has sailed the East Coast all his life and cruised thousands of miles



How a 'handy-billy' can stand in for a beefcake crew



You can make up a handy-billy with a few fathoms of spare line and a couple of rigging blocks

Dick Durham explains the benefits of a simple block-and-tackle to ease the strain whenever you have to deal with a heavy load shorthanded

Handy-billy sounds like some hired cow-poke from Wyoming, but by the simple arrangement of having two spare running rigging blocks made up with a few fathoms of strong line, a short-handed yachtsman can carry out tasks usually only possible with a mob-handed crew.

Most cruising boats have spare blocks and line doing nothing in their bosun's locker, so it's a good idea to make up a handy-billy and then have it ready to deploy in an emergency.

The purchase you get depends on the number of sheaves your blocks have. We used a 3:1 and it was fit for all the tasks we set it to.

There are any number of problems a handy-billy can solve. I've had one ready aboard all my boats for as long as I can remember. I even keep a block-and-tackle in the locker beneath the thwart of my 12ft centreboard sailing tender, and have used it to haul her, solo, up a slipway for repairs, careening and painting.

Freeing a riding turn

We set up the starboard side genoa sheet and then deliberately saw to it that a riding turn jammed the winch. To free it, one end of the handy-billy was lashed to the spinnaker winch – abaft the sheet winch – and the other end tied to the genoa sheet forward of the winch. We used a clove hitch on the sheet, which worked, but a rolling hitch is more effective. The weight of the sheet was then transferred to the handy-billy allowing the sheet abaft of the clove hitch to go slack. The riding turn could then be unbent from the winch.



A riding turn can be serious in a squall. One way of freeing it is to take up the tension of the sheet with the handy-billy

Makeshift derrick

We shackled the handy-billy to the end of the main boom, swung it out over the pontoon using the topping lift as an anchor and connected the other end to an 8hp outboard. It was easy to lift the motor from the pontoon and then ease it over the guard-rail onto the deck. This arrangement can also be used to launch or retrieve an inflatable, kedge anchor, lengths of ground chain – or a man overboard.



Adjust the angle of your spinnaker guy by using the handy-billy as a makeshift 'tweaker'

Barber hauling

When the spinnaker guy is through the pole and tending to ride up, spoiling the set of the sail and spilling the wind, a handy-billy can be bent on to the toerail (or shackled to the deck rail in this case), but it could be lashed to a midship cleat or anchor point instead. The upper shackle is then fastened over the top of the sheet – crown uppermost so that it can slide along the sheet at will – and then sweated down and made up with a couple of half hitches. The same arrangement can be used to get a better angle on genoa sheets.



Using a handy-billy to rig a jury jib sheet

Failed sheet

John Simpson's Warrior 40 sets a self-tacking staysail. If the sheet or winch fails, a handy-billy can be used in its place. Any sheeting arrangement, be it for mainsail, headsail or mizzen, can be replaced with a handy-billy as a jury-sheeting system.



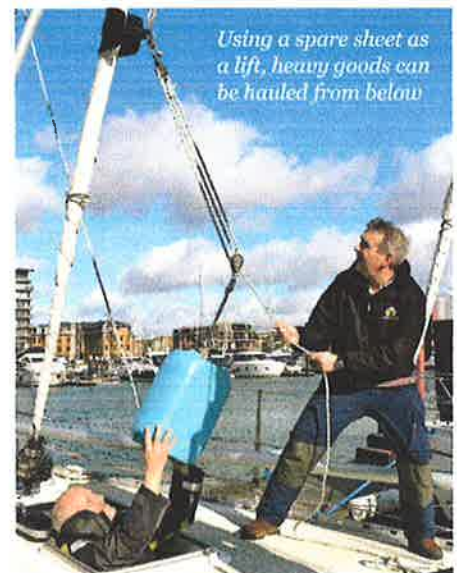
Lifting a heavy outboard engine on and off the deck is back-breaking work without the handy-billy

Failed rigging



Failed standing rigging can be temporarily fixed

I lost a mast once while sailing my 18ft Essex One Design, close-hauled in a fresh breeze. The timber sections simply collapsed within the standing rigging, but I was lucky because although the spar itself had failed the rigging was still good and held the mast up. A more serious problem is when the standing rigging itself fails. If you're lucky enough not to lose the mast when this happens, you put about immediately onto the opposite tack. And that is when a handy-billy can be used on the bitter end of the failed rigging (if the cotter pin, shroud shackle or bottle screw has failed). If the rigging itself has failed, then a spare halyard can be used and sweated down by means of the handy-billy.



Using a spare sheet as a lift, heavy goods can be hauled from below

Foredeck lift

Using the spinnaker halyard fed through a tacker we shackled the handy-billy to the fall and used it to lift a 20-litre jerrycan from the fo'c'sle. This can be used to handle the generator, tools from a bosun's locker or other heavy equipment. ▲

THANKS TO: John Simpson of Christmas Caribbean Rallies for the use of Chiscos, his Warrior 40