

Tiller locks

TESTED

Ben Meakins compares three tiller-locking devices for effectiveness, ease of set-up and user-friendliness

Short- and single-handed sailing is made much easier with some way of securing the helm so you can do other things. Autopilots are perhaps the best solution, but they are expensive and can draw too much power for some small boats. Wheel-steered boats generally have a friction lock on the wheel boss to secure the wheel, but tiller-steered boats generally have had to look to lashing the tiller to make an escape from the helm.

That's where tiller-locking devices come in handy. They vary in design, price and function, but at their most basic level they will hold the tiller in one place, allowing you to quickly nip off and tie on a fender, adjust a halyard or, if you've set the boat up properly, make a cup of tea.

How we tested them

We mounted all three devices on the spare tiller for my Impala 28 and headed out into a brisk 15- to 20-knot south-westerly breeze in the Solent. We engaged each tiller-locking device in turn, looking at how easy it was to set up, engage and disengage each one, and what each one felt like to use. We set the boat up so that the sails were balanced nicely before allowing each one to steer for a while.

TillerClutch

PRICE: From £49.36 (\$77.59) + P&P

Contact: www.wavefrontmarine.com



We found this product online. Made in the USA by WaveFront Marine, it's a similar idea to the Tiller Lock, but in a much smaller package. Made from anodised aluminium with stainless fastenings, it's designed to be screwed to the handle end of the tiller so that the clutch lever can be operated with one hand while steering normally. A 5mm line is supplied, and, like the Tiller Tamer, is designed to be cleated at each end for quick release.

In use, we found the TillerClutch to be the easiest and quickest to flick on and off thanks to its mounting location and the design of the lever. It gripped the line well and the captive line was in no danger of falling out.