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WOODEN BOAT FITTINGS

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MAKING YOUR OWN SOUNDING LEAD

Our foundry casts sounding leads for us in standard weights of 7, 14, and 28lbs. They can also provide them in bronze at the same size and about ninety per cent of the weight.

For pocket cruisers in shoal waters, I think 3 lbs is a heavy enough lead to use. If I were going far offshore or charting harbour approaches or somesuch, I might want to take a 7 lb (or heavier) one as well.

However, it's not difficult to make a small sounding lead yourself. I'm sure there are several ways, but here's how I made mine –

1. Start with a piece of copper pipe about, say, 1" dia. and 6" long, and flare both ends slightly (a ball peen hammer will do it okay.)
2. Get hold of a small stainless shackle whose pin end, with pin, will fit into the pipe.
3. Take out the pin, insert a stainless thimble on which your line will later be spliced, and replace the pin. Tie a temporary piece of tie-wire around the thimble.
4. Stand the pipe vertically in a soup-tin (with the larger flared end, if there is one, at the bottom) and sitting on a disk of wood. Pour a bit of absolutely dry sand around the outside of the pipe to maybe half its height— enough to hold the pipe in place. (Cook the sand first if necessary to drive out any water it might contain— it can explode otherwise if you spill some molten lead on it.)
5. Melt sufficient lead to fill the pipe, and do just that. I use a cast-iron frying-pan with a pouring spout for this, and a second handle fixed opposite the original one to help handle the weight. (It's better to have a bit too much lead than not enough, as you don't want a cold joint half-way down. And of course use goggles and leather gloves for safety's sake while you're pouring.)
6. As soon as you've poured the lead and while it's still molten, dangle the shackle, pin first, into the lead until just the end with thimble, still loose on the shackle, is above the surface. Hold it steady until the lead solidifies. (If you're a belt-and-braces person who wants to be doubly certain the shackle won't pull out, you can dangle a short length of small chain from the shackle pin down the pipe before pouring.)
7. When everything's cooled, take the new lead out and splice or seize your line round the thimble. (Use braided line for this as it kinks less readily than stranded.) Mark the line however you want, but make sure you do it in such a way as to avoid any slippage of the mark along the line. I use whippings round the line and stitched through it. The markings can be at any interval you choose, but I'd use 1' intervals at least as far as your vessel's draft-plus-freeboard. You can expect the lead to lie flat on the bottom when cast, so take your measurements from the shackle. (There's usually no need to use the traditional bits of leather, cloth, and so on at various depths unless you particularly want to, because you won't want more than about 30' of line at most.) Splice or seize a wrist loop at the bitter end, to saving losing your creation on the first cast.
8. To make the lead even more useful, drill out a shallow recess in the bottom (or cast it with a recess when pouring) so you can arm it with soap, vaseline, or the traditional tallow before use to bring up a sample of the bottom. Reference to the chart can then help make it easier to see where you are.

WE HELP PEOPLE COMPLETE CLASSIC BOATS AUTHENTICALLY

Horn cleats	Jam cleats	Thumb cleats	Thimbles	Masthoops
Beeblocks	Belaying pins	Blocks	Deadeyes	Bullseyes
Saddles	Fairleads	Toggles	Pennant staffs	Jackstaffs
