

Braidline eye splicing

Every month
'KNOW-HOW'



Don't be put off by the tricky reputation of this classic sailing skill. Tom Cunliffe makes it look easy



Tom Cunliffe uses a mallet to help the rope's core run smooth as he splices an eye into a length of braidline



Tools of the trade: (from top) sharp knife, set of fids, mallet, scissors – all available from your local hardware store and chandler's

Show me a sailor of 2010 and I'll show you a person familiar with braidline. We can knot it, jam it and coil it, but few of us can splice it. Splicing the ship's working ropes was once a given skill of any sailor. Three-strand rope used to be the standard issue, and many of us can splice this with one hand tied behind our backs. After all, the whole thing is out in the fresh air. We can see the parts of the rope, so we can tell what's going on and if we get it wrong, it's obvious straight away. Braidline is seen as a different animal altogether. But the job isn't nearly so hard as it seems. It's also highly satisfying and so long as you're not too ambitious about finesse, with a little practice it can be a piece of cake. The splice we show here is not the most sophisticated one under the heavens, but all of us can do it on our own boats, with no special kit other than a set of splicing fids.

ALL PHOTOS: PATRICK ROACH

Anatomy of braidline

Braidline can come in various guises, but the most common is double braid, or braid-on-braid. Variants with different types of core require alternative techniques. If I'm specifying braidline for my boat, I always go for this, because the choice means I don't need the services of a rigger.



Braid-on-braid has a braided core as well as a cover. The core is much more softly laid than the outer sheath

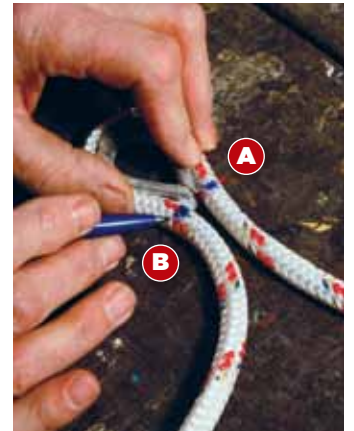
The braidline eye splice



1 First, sharpen your knife. If it's blunt, it will rip up the rope and make life a misery. Cut a fresh end carefully on a chopping board. The rope will try to unlay as soon as you lay the knife on it, so guard against this as best you can throughout the job.



2 Find the right size fid for the diameter of your rope – there should be a number on the fid to guide you – and measure one fid length from the end. Make a small dot on the rope with a marker pen (Mark A).



3 Take the rope around your thimble (or if you're not using a thimble, just decide how big you want the loop), and mark again as shown (Mark B).



4 a,b,c The splicing will disturb the rope's core and you need to tie a knot in the rope to stop it unravelling. Tie the knot about 6ft from Mark B. Set the knot upon a hook, if you have one, or contrive a substitute. The knot I used is shown to the right. ➔

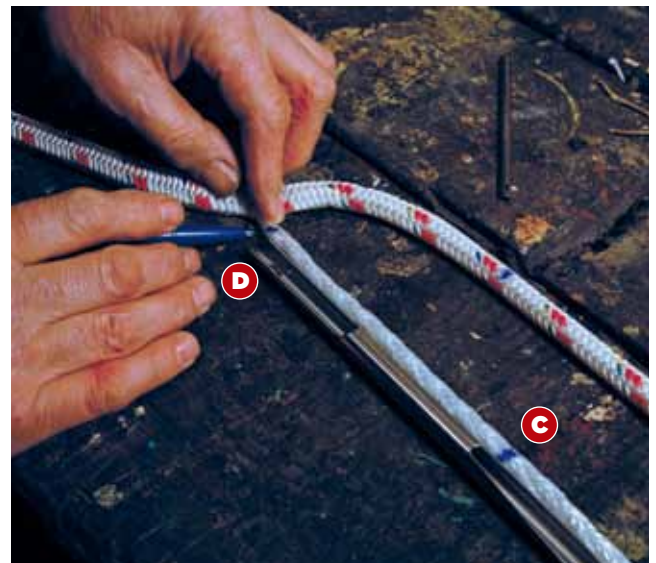


5 a,b,c Carefully open the coat at Mark B so that you can tease out the bight of the core. Use the smallest fid for this, but any reasonably blunt prodder will do. Part enough strands to get a good grip on the core. If the core doesn't come easily once you have hold of it, you've trapped a bit of the coat. Look carefully and sort it out.



6 When the core is clear and in hand, pull it right out from the bitter end so that you have the two parts lying next to one another. Finally, smooth out the coat with a 'milking' action towards the end to make sure any distortion is knocked out of it.

7 Lay the fid alongside the coat as shown. Then, holding the end of the fid and the core together between finger and thumb, pull out one fid length of core. It will come easily.

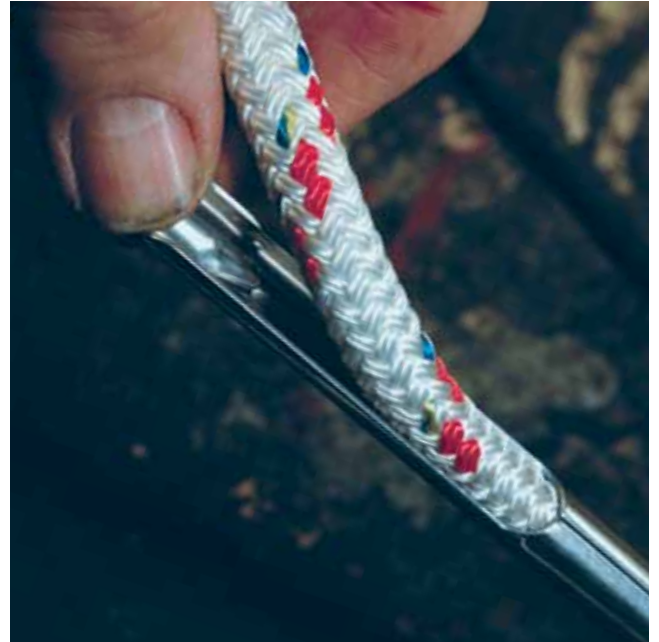


8 Put Mark C on the core at the point it is now exiting the coat.

9 Now pull out a further length of core. Lay the fid alongside it and place another mark two-thirds of a fid length from C. This is Mark D.



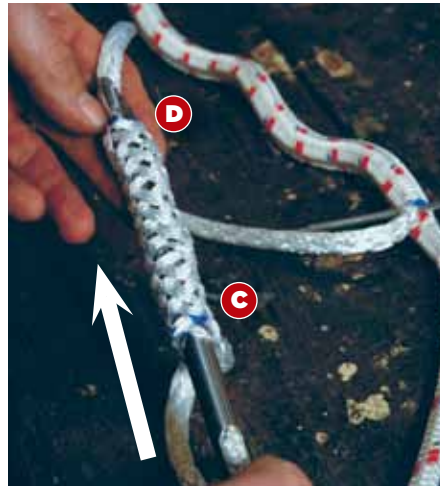
10 Pull out as much core as you can comfortably persuade to cooperate and pin it temporarily with your smallest fid. This serves no real purpose other than to make life easier.



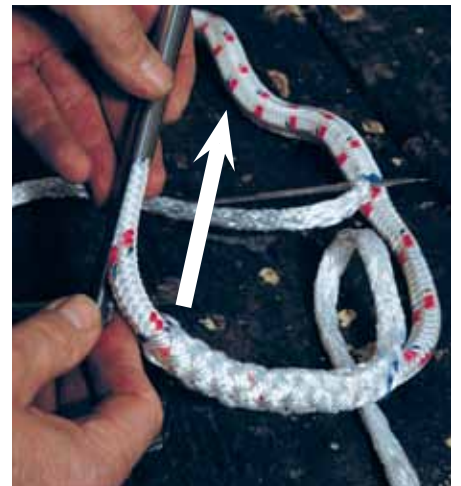
11 Load the coat into the fid by pushing the end into the hollow towards the sharp tip of the fid. When it's inside, lay the rest into the blunt end, where a built-in hook will grab it.



12 Open up the core at Mark C (the mark nearest the core's end), insert the fid.



13 Work it along the inside of the core to Mark D.



14 Poke it out there and pull the fid and the coat all the way through.



15 Disengage the fid.



16 Next, very carefully, milk the core so that it closes neatly around the coat.



17 Then gingerly pull the coat back so that its end just disappears inside the core. →

EXPERT ON BOARD



18 Take the tiny fid away from where it's been pinning the core and push it through the core/coat assembly. If you don't pin this, there's a real danger that the coat will slide out of the core while you are attending to the next stage.



19 Load the end of the core into a fid. Select the biggest fid you can conveniently pass through the inside of the coat. The core end will be breaking up by now, so wet it and stuff it into the fid as best you can.



20 Insert this fid at the point where the core that is surrounding the coat ends. This is also approximately Mark A. Work the fid towards Mark B where the core is exiting the coat. The fid will actually disappear inside the coat during this stage. This is the trickiest part of the splice.



21 Weasel the fid a little way past Mark B, at least one circumference of the rope. It is vital that once you are past Mark B, you don't snag the core in the undisturbed ropewith the fid. If you do, the whole thing goes to rats. The way to be sure it isn't snagged, is to work the bight of the core where it's exiting the coat as you manoeuvre the fid. So long as it moves freely, all is well.



22 Don't be dismayed if you're re-struggling. You can tease it along quite nicely, but you need some perseverance to persuade it to exit neatly.



23 Free the core from the fid, then pull the core through until the loop, pictured here to the right, just disappears.



24 Remove the pin and carefully smooth everything down, paying particular attention to the section of coat which is now part of the eye. This may have been distorted. Sort it out so that it looks natural. →

EXPERT ON BOARD



25 Now, at last, it's fun time! Holding the loop in both hands, pull the splice away from the knot on the hook. You'll see the bare core part of the loop swallowed up rapidly into the coat.



26 As the core/coat combo arrives at the splice, things will not go so easily. If it looks like sticking, don't force it. Instead, milk some slack out of the coat, away from the knot and towards the loop. Literally hold it tight and run your hands along it. You'll see the slack moving towards the splice. Keep the tension on and, as you milk, the splice will swallow it up. As one friend of mine observed, it's closely akin to threading knicker elastic.



27 When the combo has disappeared and all you've got left is a diminishing loop that looks like complete rope, introduce the thimble and carry on with the good work of milking.



28 As the thimble pulls up tight, slip some sort of stout tommy bar into it and heave hard, still milking if necessary. Use the long extension from an old socket set.



29 As soon as you think you're nearly there, cut off that untidy length of core that's hanging out below the splice. Now take the tommy bar in both hands, lean back, count to three, and jerk it hard a couple of times. What's left of the core will vanish inside and the thimble should be tight as a nut. If it doesn't look perfectly smooth, give it a hack or two with a mallet and another jerk for good luck. ▲



↓ TAPERING

Tapering the splice makes a neater job and a professional will tell you it also confers additional strength. This is surely true, but I have found tapering is by far the trickiest item on the list and the splice works well without it. We use Selma fids and in the system they include with these

fids, Selma actually recommends leaving out the taper. The main thing for the average sailor is to be able to execute a good working splice, so I have not included a taper here. Selma fids are available from You Boat Marine. Tel: 02392 522 226. Website: www.youboatmarine.com

OTHER SPLICES

For more on splicing different kinds of rope as well as other information and tips on ropework, Tom and rigger Peter Martin made an excellent DVD on the subject, *Ropework, Knots and Splices*. You can find it on www.amazon.co.uk priced from £6.50.