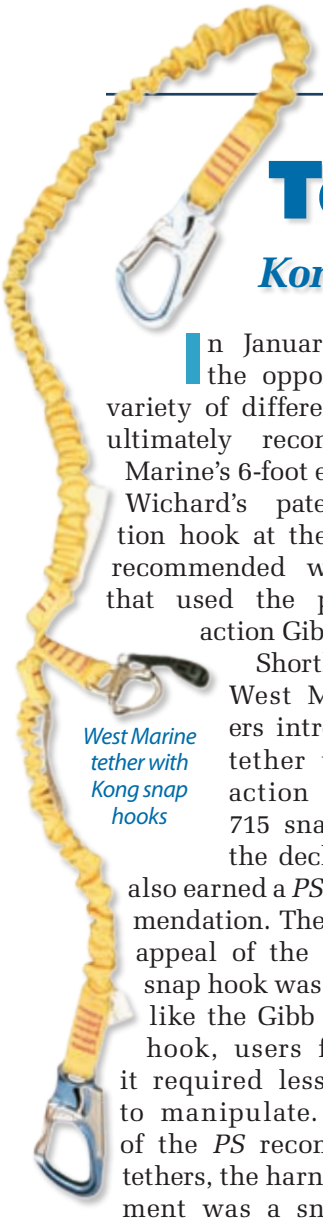
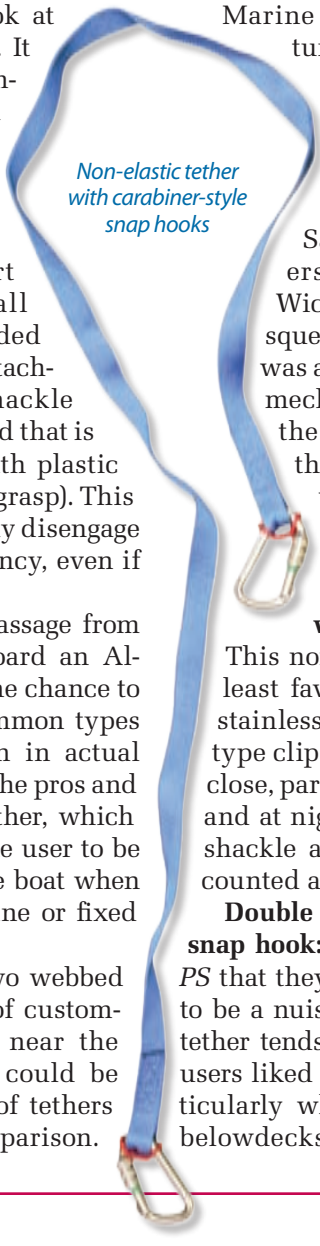
Tether Types

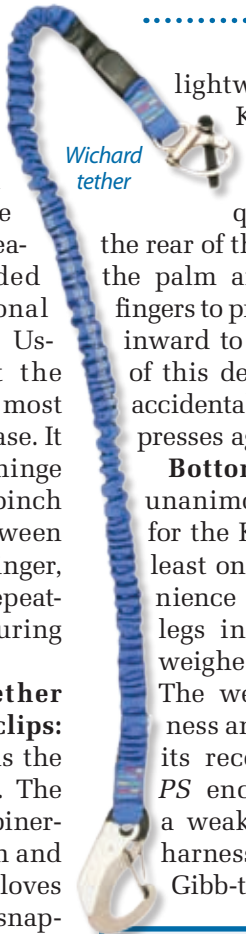
Kong hook, double tether rank high.



West Marine tether with Kong snap hooks



Non-elastic tether with carabiner-style snap hooks



Wichard tether

In January 2007, *PS* had the opportunity to test a variety of different safety tethers, ultimately recommending West Marine's 6-foot elastic tether with Wichard's patented double-action hook at the deck end. Also recommended were two tethers that used the patented double-action Gibb hook.

Shortly after that test, West Marine and others introduced a similar tether using a double-action Kong Tango 715 snap hook at the deck end. It also earned a *PS* recommendation. The main appeal of the Kong snap hook was that, like the Gibb snap hook, users found it required less effort to manipulate. On all of the *PS* recommended tethers, the harness attachment was a snap shackle (equipped with a lanyard that is knotted or threaded with plastic beads to make it easy to grasp). This allows the user to quickly disengage the tether in an emergency, even if it is under load.

Last summer, on a passage from Boston to Bermuda aboard an Alden 44, *PS* testers had the chance to compare how three common types of snap hooks function in actual use, as well as evaluate the pros and cons of a two-legged tether, which is designed to permit the user to be always connected to the boat when moving from one jackline or fixed point to the next.

The Alden 44 had two webbed jacklines and a series of custom-installed deck fittings near the cockpit where tethers could be attached. Three types of tethers were used for the comparison.

The Wichard single-leg elastic tether (nearly identical to our 2007 favorite from West Marine), a West Marine two-leg elastic tether with Kong snap hook, and a third single-leg tether that used carabiner screw-gate style clips at both ends.

Wichard elastic single-leg: Users unanimously preferred the elastic tether over the non-elastic. This feature automatically removed any slack in the tether, preventing hang-ups on deck. Both this tether and the West Marine tether also featured sewn-in flags that are revealed if the tethers are overstressed, a feature recommended by the International Sailing Federation. Users concluded that the Wichard required the most squeezing effort to release. It was also noted that the hinge mechanism tended to pinch the fold of skin between the thumb and forefinger, which happened repeatedly to one user during the trip.

Non-elastic tether with screw-gate clips: This non-elastic tether was the least favorite of the three. The stainless Italian-made carabiner-type clips were slow to open and close, particularly wearing gloves and at night. The lack of a snap-shackle at the harness end also counted against it.

Double leg tether with Kong snap hook: Some sailors have told *PS* that they find the two-leg tether to be a nuisance because the spare tether tends to get in the way. Our users liked the added security, particularly when transitioning from belowdecks to above decks. The lightweight aluminum-alloy Kong snap hook was the clear favorite. The double-action design required the user to depress the rear of the hook with the heel of the palm and simultaneously use fingers to press the front of the hook inward to open the gate. Because of this design, the hook can't be accidentally opened if something presses against the gate.

Bottom line: Testers were unanimous in their preference for the Kong snap hook and, at least on this trip, any inconvenience caused by having two legs instead of one was outweighed by the added safety. The well-made Wichard harness and snap hook maintains its recommended status, but *PS* encourages anyone with a weaker grip to look first at harnesses fitted with either the Gibb-type or Kong hook.

The quick-release shackle allows the wearer to quickly disengage the tether in an emergency.

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