

Person Overboard

I thought it appropriate that I bring to members' attention some of the circumstances that occurred last Wednesday.



The photo was taken at the very moment of the incident, you can see the splash of a crew member hitting the water on the port side of the leeward yacht. Photo courtesy Jeff Lewis.

Accidental Gybe

In a recent Twilight race a yacht had an accidental gybe, they are not the first yacht that has had this happen and they certainly won't be the last.

The potential for an accident increases when crews are relaxed and not enough attention is being applied to the job of sailing the boat. On a warm evening, with a light breeze coming from behind, there is little apparent breeze to remind the crew that we are sailing.

We all know that there are some pretty big wind shifts in the area in which we race heightening the potential for an accidental gybe. Even in light air the boom can swing across the cockpit with incredible force.

Please make sure that our crews are aware of the dangers of being inside the arc of the boom and above its height and remain aware of the environment they are in.

MOB Retrieval

Julian Todd spoke about Man Over Board at dinner after the race about the importance MOB practice. I have been fortunate enough to have had training for MOB, in fact in one course I did we were subjected to an average of 3 drills an hour all the way from Middle Harbour to America Bay in the Pittwater.

MOB in the Harbour is practically quite easy, keep a lookout so as not to lose sight of the victim, get to the victim as quickly as possible under motor or sail. There are then a couple of schools of thought, get into a position where the boat will drift onto the victim, or the complete opposite let the victim drift to the boat. The latter is the preferred method taught to me to use in sheltered waters. Most Important BE PROP AWARE know exactly where your propeller is in relation to the victim.

Retrieval can be extremely difficult even with a fit victim, they will probably be exhausted and also in a degree of shock, they will not have the strength to get themselves on board. We had quite a bit of difficulty getting one of the victims on board last Wednesday and he was conscious.

MOB practice is very important, although most practice does not involve a real person, while it does reinforce the method of getting to the victim it does not prepare anybody for getting the victim on board. I would like to suggest human victim retrieval with a real person in the water, practice getting them out of the water without their assistance.

Safety Gear

We always put an emergency boarding ladder out together with a life-sling, I have often thought "Why am I doing this for a couple of hours on the harbour?" After using both of these items on Wednesday I will never think that again.

Victim Care

We have crew with first aid certificates, good luck more than good management, I would suggest that every crew have at least one member with an up to date certificate. The guys that we got on board on Wednesday evening were typical of most of us, they had an ability to swim, they didn't panic when in the water, but they like me were not at the peak of their physical fitness, When they were on board they were exhausted and I suspect suffering a bit of shock. It was a balmy evening, but these guys were shivering un-controllably, the crew were able to get some of their wet clothes off and wrap them in dry towels, we have blankets on board – somewhere – we have now decided to add a few "Space blankets" to our first aid kit, hopefully they will never be needed but at least everyone will know where they're stored.

Bottom Line

We were not the closest boat to this incident but we were in open space which meant we could quickly and safely manoeuvre into a position to assist, where the closer boats really lacked the space to safely manoeuvre. Even if you are not the closest be prepared to assist in an emergency.

Make sure your safety gear is readily accessible and your crew know how to use it – practice again.

Good news is that all three crew members of the yacht concerned, one that stayed on board, one that was knocked into the water and another who dived in to give assistance are all OK and have been checked and cleared of any potential ongoing issues.'

Graeme Davey
Skipper G-Whizz