

Dealing with a man overboard

Simon Winkley, RYA Coach/Assessor takes a look at teaching man overboard (MOB) recovery to intermediate students.

Tidal considerations

Unlike picking up a mooring, where the target is secured to the sea bed, MOB recovery is the same for tidal and non-tidal waters as the boat and the MOB are affected similarly by tide and wind. The exception is with tricky tidal eddies in a location such as an estuary, where the MOB may be carried away from the boat.

Immediate action

At the point when we lose someone overboard, several things need to happen quickly. With a boat speed of only three knots, the person could be 50 feet away in just 10 seconds.

1. The remaining crew shouts 'MAN OVERBOARD!' to alert other water users.
2. The dinghy is brought under control and sailed away across the wind.
3. The jib is released, simplifying the job of the helm.
4. The MOB is watched closely, with a pointer allocated if any crew are left on board.

The distance to sail away from the MOB is generally about 10-12 boat lengths for a monohull, or up to 15 boat lengths for a multihull.

Approach and manoeuvre

In monohulls the boat should be tacked to return to the MOB, while a multihull is more suited to a gybe to avoid getting stuck in irons and to prevent the vessel creeping upwind too much.

- » After tacking, sharply bear



'Spill and fill' to position the MOB by the windward shroud with the boat stopped in the lying-to position.

away and give a big ease of the mainsail before heading up onto a close reach.

- » 'Spill and fill' to position the MOB by the windward shroud with the boat stopped in the lying-to position.
- » Go forward to collect the MOB, which will act as a drogue.
- » If a small excess of boat speed is present, a slight flick of the tiller to windward should reduce any chance of tacking around the MOB as contact is made.

With catamarans, the MOB can be collected between the two hulls **except** where the presence of a forward towing bridle or dolphin striker means a risk of injury to the MOB. In this case, the approach to the MOB should be the same as for a monohull.

Rising to the challenge

To create a realistic scenario, as the training exercise commences, the crew should sit amidships and not communicate with the helm.

Vary the challenge by specifying that it's the helm who has fallen overboard. When the exercise commences the helm should drop the tiller and mainsheet, crouch down and move quickly forward into the middle of the boat. This provides the crew with the challenge of swiftly moving aft, taking the helm and bringing the boat under control on a beam reach.

Considerations

Underline the importance of these four stages:

1. Plan (quickly!)
2. Approach
3. Manoeuvre
4. Escape (Plan B in case the approach or manoeuvre goes wrong)

Other coaching points:

- » Releasing the jib in a training environment, effectively places

a large flag on the front of the boat to reinforce wind direction.

- » In strong winds, the problem of flogging jib sheets can be alleviated by furling, if available.
- » Remember to teach your students to plan an escape route if the approach goes wrong.
- » Students should drop the MOB device into the water next to the boat and resist the urge to hurl it away as this makes the exercise unrealistic.
- » Methods of recovery of a real MOB should be discussed in a debrief.

MOB gear

All RYA training centres should have a device for practicing this exercise, as an actual person **must never** be used deliberately. This may take the form of an old buoyancy aid clipped to a car tyre, a small buoy with chain links shackled on for weight or something more creative. The picture below shows a simple device using a 19 litre water bottle wearing a buoyancy aid with an anchor to reduce drift.

Finally, remind students that prevention is better than cure. Many a sailor has been plunged into the sea following something as simple as a snapped toe strap. Teaching students to make sensible checks of the boat's equipment before setting out could prevent the situation occurring in the first place.



MOB devices come in many shapes and sizes



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