



The Cruising Club of America

REPORT OF THE YACHT-TO-YACHT CREW RESCUE REVIEW TEAM

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REVIEW CONVENED AND CONDUCTED BY
THE CRUISING CLUB OF AMERICA
WITH US SAILING AND THE BERMUDA RACE
FOUNDATION

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On the cover: The crew of Arcona 46 *IdaLina* abandons ship for rescue by *Pacific Wind*, a 45-foot Bavaria (not pictured) during a Pacific Ocean crossing.
(Monica Candler)

FOREWORD

It is a great honor to have been asked by The Cruising Club of America, one of the foremost authorities in sailing worldwide, to write a foreword to a groundbreaking report on yacht-to-yacht-crew rescues. This report draws on a wealth of knowledge from highly experienced sailors across cruising and racing communities. Meticulously compiled by a global team of safety-at-sea experts, it is the most comprehensive examination of this topic ever produced.

Every sailor—whether offshore or nearshore—MUST contemplate the possibility of finding themselves in distress or being called upon to assist another vessel. While it is certainly more enjoyable to daydream about far horizons or racing tactics, preparing for the unforeseen is a fundamental responsibility. We do this not only to save ourselves and our crew but also to honor the age-old law of the sea, which requires assisting others in distress.

We begin this preparation at the docks by ensuring that we have left no gaps in critical maintenance to avoid catastrophic failures—such as sinking, dismasting, or fires—and by carrying the equipment needed to manage breakages, injuries, or illnesses. However, despite the most thorough preparations, unforeseeable events outside our control remain possible: extreme weather, collisions with semi-submerged objects, medical emergencies, or material failures.

In such moments, quick and accurate decisions rely on our seamanship skills and theoretical understanding of the unforeseen. Because it is nearly impossible (and highly undesirable!) to gain practical experience in every type of emergency, the most valuable source of information is the hard-earned experience of others.

This report is an eye-opener about situations most people never contemplate, while providing detailed analysis of a multitude of real-life, yacht-to-yacht crew rescues, each with different circumstances. The rescue processes are broken down into sequential stages, with discussions and recommended practices. Successful tactics and unforeseen complications are highlighted, making it essential reading for any sailor. Race organizers and safety-at-sea leaders should incorporate this report's recommendations into their training and preparations as a vital extension of traditional safety-at-sea protocols.

I speak from personal experience, having assisted my fellow competitor, Tapio Lehtinen [aboard *Asteria*], during the 2022 Golden Globe Race. While the rescue was ultimately successful, there are critical lessons I wish I had known beforehand as well as specific items that would have made the rescue easier and quicker.

I'm sure Tapio would concur; seeing his raft drift away as it was deployed undoubtedly added unnecessary shock and adrenaline to an already life-threatening situation. A

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minor addition—an extra pair of reading glasses in his grab-bag—would have made it much easier for him to send YB3 [satellite text messaging] messages and to read instructions for deploying his flares. Furthermore, smoke flares for daytime signaling would have greatly facilitated my efforts to locate him as he drifted in his life raft with the bright, rising sun behind him.

You will read about these types of complications—both large and small—alongside many other gripping accounts from those in the life rafts and from those conducting the rescues. This thought-provoking presentation highlights the critical decisions that arise during a yacht-to-yacht crew rescue, offering life-saving insights to anyone who may ever face distress at sea.

Kirsten Neuschäfer
S/V Aglaia
Uunartoq, Greenland
July 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: [Incident reviews](#) after the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race included recommendations to further study the challenges of yacht-to-yacht crew rescues (YTYCRs). The Cruising Club of America (CCA) established a YTYCR Review Team and partnered with US Sailing and the Bermuda Race Foundation (BRF) to convene a team of safety-at-sea experts to assess rescue techniques and practices. This team identified 28 documented incidents, conducted research including interviews with many of the principals, and prepared this report.

While each YTYCR was unique, we identified capabilities and key decisions common to the rescues, actions that contributed to success or posed challenges, and five stages of each rescue. The Summary of Report Team Consensus follows on pages six and seven. Details are found in chapters 3 and 4, chapter 6 provides a summary of all 28 incidents, and Appendix I lists abbreviations and conventions.

Incidents involved yachts beyond the range of shore-based Search and Rescue (SAR) facilities or situations involving rapid sinking for which shore or ship-based rescue was not timely or feasible. Skippers and crews of sailing yachts should study and be familiar with YTYCR, as they may be the nearest or only vessel able to rescue another crew.

While few, if any, crews of either the vessel in distress (VID) or the rescue vessel (RV) had trained for a YTYCR, prior safety-at-sea training (SAS), although not specific to YTYCR, was cited by many crews as contributing to the success of the rescues.

Effective communication by all means—from flares and VHF to sophisticated satellite communications—was critical to the success of each rescue; it is sobering to consider reports of other vessels that were never heard from again.

Essential decisions should be made promptly. Important decisions included: (1) VID's decision to call for assistance; (2) the RV's agreement to assist; (3) the decision to abandon the VID; (4) the method of transferring crew from the VID to the RV; (5) how to care for and deliver the rescued crew.

Most YTYCRs were accomplished using a life raft; the RV approach and crew transfer processes pose considerable risks. Agreement between the skipper of the VID and the RV on a rescue plan and method of rescue before the rescue was initiated was central to the smooth execution of the rescue. Embarking the VID crew presents additional challenges. Prompt medical and emotional assessment is indicated. In many incidents, the increase in the number of persons aboard the RV after the rescue was stressful for both crews and for the RV.

The Review Team plans to collaborate with leaders in safety-at-sea training, race management, and the media to make these conclusions available to offshore sailors.

SUMMARY OF REPORT TEAM CONSENSUS: Summaries of consensus recommendations reported in Chapters 3 and 4 of The CCA Report of the Yacht-to-Yacht Crew Rescue Review Team are presented here. The review team urges readers to refer to the individual chapters for detailed explanations.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES: Essential decisions should be made promptly at various points as the YTYCR unfolds. The first is whether and when to issue an emergency call. Circumstances and specifics will determine the pace of decision-making and whether time is available for assessment, damage control, and self-rescue options, or whether to abandon. A vessel hearing a distress call will need to decide whether to assist, taking into account whether the RV or her crew would be at unacceptable risk in rendering assistance. The skippers of the RV and VID should mutually decide on a plan based on the VID's needs and the manner in which the RV can assist, ranging from standing by, to transferring supplies or gear, or preparing for rescue. The VID skipper must prioritize crew safety when deciding to abandon, which may result in abandoning a vessel that is afloat and could possibly be saved. The RV skipper must decide how to deliver the VID's crew safely ashore, sometimes including a decision whether to continue racing, if relevant.

COMMUNICATIONS AND DETERMINING VID LOCATION AND STATUS:

Effective communication is essential to a successful rescue. All Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs) and Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) should be registered with SAR and relevant organizations, as failure to register caused problems in some incidents. Satellite communications or SSB may enable the VID to establish voice communications with the RV or shore-based assets, which may be required as intermediaries. All potential rescue vessels should monitor communications at all times and document emergency communications. Determine the VID's location, range, and bearing using a chart plotter, AIS, or a paper chart. A well-functioning VHF will become essential when within range; direct VHF communications between the VID and RV should be established as soon as possible. Flares, or smoke flares for daytime signaling, may assist the RV in locating the VID. Take a handheld VHF, an AIS unit, and PLBs into the life raft, but do not leave them in the life raft after rescue.

RESCUE VESSEL RESPONSE AND VESSEL-IN-DISTRESS PREPARATIONS FOR RESCUE:

Once the RV decides to render assistance, essential steps include preparing the RV and crew for a rescue, communicating with the VID and SAR assets, and understanding the nature and urgency of the distress. Safety of the RV and VID crew should be paramount. If a rescue is required, agree on a detailed abandonment and rescue plan and communicate it to both crews. Command of the abandonment process should be assumed by a person on scene, usually the RV skipper.

VESSEL-IN-DISTRESS ABANDONMENT AND RESCUE VESSEL APPROACH

PROCESS: The RV approach and crew transfer pose significant risk to the VID, the RV, and their crews. Primary risks during the RV's approach include collision, fouling of the RV's propeller, damage (e.g., accidental jibe) to either vessel while maneuvering, and crew MOB or injury. On the VID, the life raft can be deployed from midships or the stern. A vessel lying beam to the waves and swell will have less stern pitch, and one lying bow to the waves and swell will have less beam roll. The two vessels should develop and agree on a detailed plan for abandonment, RV approach, and transfer. It may be preferable to delay abandonment until daylight or improved weather, if possible, and a decision should be made about whether to leave an EPIRB aboard the VID.

BRINGING THE VESSEL-IN-DISTRESS CREW ONBOARD THE RESCUE

VESSEL: In most circumstances, the best method of transferring crew from the VID to the RV is via life raft (or dinghy); bringing the vessels alongside or swimming is fraught. High winds or seas can make deploying the life raft difficult. If possible, transfer all crew in one trip. Do not initiate the transfer until the skippers have agreed on the method, timing, and gear to bring to the RV, and crews have been fully briefed. Whether to embark aboard the RV midships or at the stern depends on boat orientation, boat design, and conditions. A life raft, designed for stability, is extremely difficult to move, placing large loads on the painter in high wind or seas. It may be necessary to use a winch on both the VID, and the RV. Life rafts typically lie with the drogue to windward and the entrance to leeward. Bringing the RV alongside the raft may require multiple attempts; making the life raft fast to the RV can be facilitated by using a throwline from the life raft in a leeward-side approach, or by deploying a drift line buoyed by a fender from the RV in a windward-side approach. Ensure that the RV's propeller is not fouled by any lines; a reconnaissance circle around the life raft at a safe distance to refine the approach and identify hazards is recommended. The embarking VID crew will need assistance in boarding. In most cases, no EPIRB or PLBs should be left in the raft.

POST-RESCUE ISSUES: Embarking the VID crew presents additional challenges. Prompt medical and emotional assessment is paramount, and plans for treatment or evacuation should be made. Contact should be made with SAR organizations and the families of the VID crew. Because the RV will likely not have a life raft large enough for both crews, special attention should be given to the safety of the RV, including the additional stress on RV systems and supplies from the increased crew. The VID skipper should continue to lead the VID crew in following the RV skipper's instructions. The RV skipper should give clear instructions on the roles of the VID crew, especially if the RV continues racing or proceeds to its next planned port. The RV skipper should determine when and where to disembark the VID crew.

CHAPTER 1: ORIGIN AND OBJECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

There are so many variables involved in the rescue of another vessel's crew onto your yacht that it is impossible to specify a precise protocol. Skippers and crews need to use seamanship skills to accomplish sequential steps of a rescue process, coincident with the environment and circumstances involved and the capabilities of the skipper, the crew, and the boat.

For clarity, the review team has broken down the rescue process into five stages and provides key objectives and insights on how to accomplish each stage. Skippers will have to combine this advice with seamanship skills to enhance their ability to execute a successful rescue.

Recent yachting incidents and post-race incident reviews of yachting events have highlighted the benefits of training and preparation for both incident and rescue yachts involved in yacht-to-yacht crew rescue. Incident reports and skipper commentaries have noted that although the skill sets and seamanship practices learned in Safety-at-Sea training courses adequately prepared them for the events, it would be beneficial to review the specific topic of yacht-to-yacht crew rescue within SAS curricula.

Recommendations from the [2024 Newport Bermuda Race Alliance inquiry](#) included that "US Sailing Safety at Sea may want to provide, or have an entity provide, a training reference for connecting boats to rafts or to supplies at sea. While conditions will make each event different, some common principles apply to boat-to-boat assistance at sea. The Abandonment and Rescue Review Team, or other qualified experts, should conduct a more in-depth review of the details of crew transfers by life raft, including command decisions, execution, consequences, and outcomes, to contribute to a knowledge base of best practices for yacht-to-yacht rescue at sea.... US Sailing Safety at Sea should consider developing "model" watch bills for abandon ship, rescue off a raft, etc."

The [2024 Newport Bermuda Race Gunga Din inquiry](#) panel concluded, "While Safety at Sea training has covered boarding a life raft from a sinking vessel, it has not covered how to transfer to a rescuing vessel, preparation for being on an overcrowded boat, or what to do with the vessel being abandoned. When two vessels need to perform a joint operation, a command structure and good communication are essential, especially as conditions deteriorate or time is short." The panel recommended that US Sailing's Safety at Sea training includes best

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practices for abandonment from a boat in danger and rescue by another small vessel. The training should cover essential communications and responsibilities for all participating parties. In most cases, the rescuing vessel should assume command of the procedures once the boat in danger has declared the crew is abandoning.

These incident reviews, along with a subsequent May 2025 Class 40 event involving *NST Cabinet Z* during the CIC Normandy Channel Race¹, sparked interest in including YTYCR training in SAS training curricula.

In November 2025, the CCA Safety & Seamanship Committee formed a Yacht-to-Yacht Crew Rescue Review Team and partnered with US Sailing and the BRF to review yacht-to-yacht crew rescue incidents and present an assessment of rescue methods and practices.

REVIEW TEAM OBJECTIVES AND PROCESSES:

Objectives: The CCA Safety & Seamanship Committee has conducted this review to identify known YTYCR incidents and to develop a knowledge base of yacht-to-yacht crew transfers from vessels being abandoned. The review analyzes incidents to evaluate the effectiveness of rescue methods and practices and to produce an analytical report and other documents outlining recommended practices for yacht-to-yacht crew rescue that safety-at-sea educators, race organizers, and skippers can incorporate into their safety programs.

Areas of study include:

1. Key elements of vessel-to-shore, vessel-to-vessel, and skipper-to-skipper communications that support successful rescues
2. Critical decisions during rescue operations
3. How the rescue vessel locates the distressed crew, whether on the boat or in a life raft
4. Coordination at the scene
5. Preparations made by both the rescuing boat and the distressed vessel
6. The rescue boat's approach to the life raft or dinghy
7. The abandonment process and the transfer of the boarding crew to the deck of the rescuing vessel, including effective and ineffective rescue methods and practices
8. Post-rescue issues

¹ <https://sailorz.com/en/class40-en/what-happened-on-the-cic-normandy-channel-race/>

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Recommendations were developed through team consensus, incorporating data review and analysis, research, and personal experiences.

Composition: The YTYCR review team included a six-person executive committee composed of CCA members, US Sailing leadership, SAS instructors, and experienced offshore sailors involved in YTYCR. Executive committee members are:

William Strassberg, MD, chair
Ernest Godshalk III, review team leader
Chuck Hawley
Bob Kostyla
Ralph Naranjo
Richard York

To gain a broad perspective with diverse and international opinions and voices, additional review team members were recruited to review incidents, analyze data, and develop collaborative team recommendations:

Alistair Hackett
Melanie Peasey
John Winder

Process: William Strassberg, MD, chair of The Cruising Club of America's Safety & Seamanship Committee, nominated Ernie Godshalk to lead the Yacht-to-Yacht Crew Rescue Review Team. An initial goal was to ensure the report's recommendations would be genuinely useful. To assist in developing practical and effective safety recommendations, a group of SAS moderators, course organizers, and race organizers was consulted to gather perspectives. Comments indicated that this was an important topic that should be included in some form in SAS training and offshore race preparations.

A YTYCR Executive Committee was formed to include a diverse range of expert voices and perspectives. Subsequently, additional and international team members were added to broaden committee viewpoints.

As a baseline, the review team identified known YTYCR incidents. An internet search was conducted, and leaders of offshore races, rallies, international sailing organizations, governing bodies, periodicals, and safety and offshore sailing experts were consulted. World Sailing reports and magazine articles were reviewed, and 21 major ocean race and rally organizations were contacted.

In about a fourth of the cases, interviews of skippers or crew of the vessel-in-distress or rescue vessel were conducted to gather additional data.

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For 28 of the identified incidents, there is sufficient information to add to a knowledge base of rescuing fellow sailors from the sea. There were no cases where a rescue was unable to be completed, and there were no fatalities in these incidents. The YTYCR Review Committee focused on these 28 incidents² for the findings in this report.

ABOUT THE CCA:

The Cruising Club of America is a group of accomplished recreational offshore sailors bound together by friendship and the desire to foster the responsibilities, expertise, and skills needed for the adventurous use of the sea. Membership is by invitation and considered a mark of achievement, reflecting one's ocean sailing accomplishments and character. Issues of safety and seamanship are managed by its Safety & Seamanship Committee, which has convened the review panel and is leading this review.

CCA core values include:

- i. Excellence in Seamanship: Upholding the highest standards of navigation, safety, and responsibility at sea.
- ii. Adventure: Inspiring sailors to explore remote and challenging waters.
- iii. Camaraderie: Fostering a supportive, friendly, and inclusive community of sailors.
- iv. Environmental Stewardship: Advocating for the protection and preservation of the marine environment.

DISCLAIMER:

The contents of this report are for information only and represent the authors' interpretations of specific, very complex, and often dangerous situations. This report cannot be taken as legal or other professional advice. Mariners should be aware that their circumstances may, and probably will, be different from the scenarios described in the report in significant ways that will impact how they need to consider any transfer of a person from one vessel to another.

Neither the authors nor The CCA, US Sailing, or the BRF can accept any liability for harm that may occur in connection with use of the information in the report.

² See Chapter 6 for a summary list of incidents

CHAPTER 2: KNOWN YACHT-TO-YACHT CREW RESCUE INCIDENTS

Most of the rescues occurred far offshore, but a significant number occurred in coastal or nearshore waters when vessels suffered catastrophic damage that led to rapid sinking, leaving no time for shore-based assets to effect a rescue. Hence, one skipper's realization, "this can obviously happen to any boat."

The Cruising Club of America, US Sailing, and the BRF's assessment of YTYCR and techniques identified 30 known incidents. Sufficient details were available to analyze 28³ incidents, 26 of which occurred since 2000. A rescue was declined in another incident not included in this report, and reports of unsuccessful YTYCR incidents were not found. Incidents were thoroughly reviewed by one experienced sailor, and the analysis was further reviewed by a team of seasoned sailors who collaborated across all incidents to make recommendations regarding rescue practices and techniques.

Note: Many other types of aid provided to a VID at sea are beyond the scope of this investigation. They include:

1. Rescues conducted by a governmental or professional rescue service.
2. Rescues by a commercial vessel that is part of the Automated Mutual-Assistance Vessel Rescue (AMVER) system.
3. Self-rescue, in which the crew reaches safety on their own.
4. Transfers of fuel, medical supplies, food, or repair supplies, or the receipt of a tow.

While these other types of incidents are of interest and worthy of study, this YTYCR investigation focused on rescues by private vessels in which a crew exchange occurred.

Sinking was the cause of the majority of YTYCR occurrences:

Sinking: 23 (82%)	Disabled: 5 (18%)
Hull Breach: 8 (28%)	Steering Failure: 2 (7%)
Rudder Stock or Rudder Bearing Structural Failure: 7 (25%)	Crew/Fear, Fatigue, or Medical: 2 (7%)
Keel Structural Failure: 6 (21%)	Rigging/Dismasted: 1 (4%)
Capsize: 2 (7%)	

³ Chapter 6 provides summaries of incidents

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Table 1: Incident causation across all 28 incidents

Most YTYCR incidents were beyond the range of shore-based assets. But there were several incidents involving coastal or close offshore vessels (four vessels, 15%) that suffered catastrophic damage necessitating immediate assistance from a nearby vessel when rapid sinking did not allow sufficient time to mobilize shore-based assets for rescue. For example:

Koomooloo was taking on water approximately 70 miles offshore in the 2006 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race. After a night of beating into a confused, fairly short sea with wind strength around 20-28 knots there was a fairly hard impact and another wave or two later, the water was over the floorboards. The rapid ingress of water necessitated immediate preparations to abandon ship and a Mayday was radioed. Adventure arrived at Koomaloo's position 40 minutes later and found her low in the water, with her eight-man crew bailing hard to keep the yacht afloat. By this time, a rescue helicopter had arrived on the scene, and Adventure was requested to take the Koomooloo crew off.

Koomooloo's skipper/owner noted: "this can obviously happen to any boat, and crews really should train for the event."

Few, if any, skippers or crews were trained in yacht-to-yacht crew rescue. Most incidents involved the use of a life raft with various transfer techniques; in several cases, the loss of the vessel was uncertain, but crew safety took priority.

CHAPTER 3: DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

No two rescues are alike, and the skippers' leadership, judgment, and seamanship skills will blend pre-voyage preparedness with effective on-the-water responses, referred to by Ralph Naranjo as the "art of seamanship." Key decisions include whether to call for assistance and deciding whether to render assistance, developing a rescue plan in coordination with a rescuing vessel, focusing on saving the vessel versus preparing to abandon, deciding when to abandon, ensuring the safe transfer of crew, and preparing to join another yacht.

Early recognition is vital. The VID skipper's acknowledgment that they may be in a Mayday and abandon-ship situation predisposes a successful outcome.

The circumstances and specifics of each incident will determine the pace of decision-making and whether there is time to attempt self-rescue or, indeed, to call for assistance at all. In the instance of inversion due to keel loss or catastrophic flooding, there is little time to ponder options, and the choice will be to immediately prepare to abandon ship, sometimes without the ability to call for help before doing so.

As reported in [Boatwatch.org](https://www.boatwatch.org), Richard Rodriguez of the Peterson 44 Raindancer said "On a 3,100-nautical-mile passage to the Marquesas from the Galápagos, with about 1400 nm left to go, sailing with good winds, sunny skies at around 6 kts. The second pizza had just come out of the oven, and I was dipping a slice into some ranch dressing when it felt like we ran into a concrete wall. I heard a loud crashing noise simultaneously with a metal clanking. I heard Alana yell, 'we hit a whale,' then I looked to port and saw a huge whale and blood gushing out of the side of it as it began swimming down. I told everyone to check the bilges, and went down myself to check for water and collision damage. Within 5 seconds the high-water bilge alarm went off, I could see water rushing in from the stern of the boat. At that point I knew the damage was very significant, and that most likely we were going to lose the boat. At that point the crew began gathering safety equipment, supplies, emergency gear, electronics, etc. and they did an extremely good job of it. I went to the back of the boat to search for the source of the water.

At this point maybe 30 seconds have gone by since impact, and while I was searching the aft bilges, rudder, stuffing box areas, the water had already filled up above the floor. It was difficult to locate the source from the inside with the water level so high already.

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At this point I was nearly certain the boat was going down, and at a rapid level. I made a last attempt to plug up water intrusion from the outside. On my way out I helped bring out the life raft and grabbed and set off one of our EPIRBs, and made a VHF radio Mayday call. I deployed the life raft and it inflated as advertised.”

There is often time to more fully assess the situation and act. In these circumstances, the ability to slow the process and provide the “grace of time” allows for decision-making about damage control and self-rescue options, or the need to abandon. This ability gives the skipper time to review choices, initiate damage control, and decide whether or when to call a pan-pan or Mayday.

Factors affecting the speed of decision-making:

- 14 (50%) of the case studies indicated that a rapid decision to abandon was required, e.g., rapid sinking or capsize. (We saw no cases of fire onboard, but this could clearly require a rapid decision.)
- 11 (39%) of the case studies suggested a more controlled problem, leading to the assumption that the decision process was more considered.
- 3 (11%) were abandoned due to crew exhaustion, fear, or fatigue.

Hearing “Mayday” electrified the crews of most vessels, and decisions to assist and communicate were mostly immediate. Vessels are required by tradition and international and national laws and agreements⁴ to, if practicable, proceed to assist a vessel in distress and, if possible, communicate with the VID and SAR. This obligation is prominent in many SAS courses, for example:

US Sailing SAS Course Chapter 1, Giving Assistance, states: For as long as mariners have been going to sea, helping others in need of assistance has been a key element of seamanship. While a number of philosophical and legal arguments can be made for assisting another sailor, crew, or vessel, the fundamental reason is that other boats are often the most likely sources of rescue. And the boat you help today may well help you in the future. Distances at sea can be enormous, and due to the frequently hostile nature of the ocean, quick response by nearby vessels is key to reducing loss of life, especially in cold water.

The decision to assist involves consideration of capabilities of the RV and her crew, as well as weather and sea conditions. International maritime law and

⁴ E.g. SOLAS 1974 Chapter V Regulation 33 and 46 U.S.C §2304

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Federal Statutes (46 USC 2304) require that "A master or individual in charge of a vessel shall render assistance to any individual found at sea in danger of being lost, so far as the master or individual in charge can do so without serious danger to the master's or individual's vessel or individuals on board."

Rob McAlpine, skipper of the RV *Sparky*, which came to the assistance of VID *Restive* returning from the 2015 Marion Bermuda Race, told George Denny, the skipper of the VID: "When you do this kind of sailing, you know the cavalry isn't always coming. So, when you get the chance, you try to be the cavalry."

Bob Kostyla, helmsman of RV *Sparky*, and member of the YTYCR report team, added: "It's maritime law, but also an obligation among sailors which one time may be to their own benefit."

The next question for most potential RVs was determining the VID's location, followed by calculating a range and bearing and consideration of whether to proceed to the VID, depending on whether the potential RV and her crew would be in significant danger and whether other vessels were closer to the VID and responding.

We became aware of only one potential RV that declined to render assistance.

Eighteen (68%) of the incidents occurred during an offshore rally or race; frequently, the rescue fleet consisted of other competitors. In 14 incidents (54%), direct VHF communication was used to make the initial call for help. Emergency communications via EPIRB to authorities, followed by AIS position location, contributed to the decision to initiate a rescue. Once the emergency had been declared and a rescue vessel had been appointed or had taken it upon itself to be involved, i.e., answering a Mayday, inter-vessel communication was conducted predominantly via VHF. Direct voice communication, particularly in the final stages of the rescue process, facilitated decision-making and the planning process between vessels.

To demonstrate how the decision-making process is facilitated by the wide range of available communications, consider the case of *Raindancer*, rescued by *Rolling Stones* on March 13, 2023, during a Pacific Ocean crossing, halfway between *Galápagos* and *Marquesas*:

Raindancer was in the middle of the longest passage for most circumnavigations, about 3,100 miles from Galápagos to the Marquesas. After hitting a whale, it was quickly determined there was no way to save the boat and the crew went into abandon ship mode. Before abandoning

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ship the crew gathered supplies and the captain, Rick Rodriguez, activated an EPIRB and sent out a Mayday on VHF.

Once in the life raft they activated a GlobalStar SPOT tracker, started regular Mayday signals via handheld VHF, and turned on an IridiumGO! and cell phone (creating a satellite service Wi-Fi hot spot) to message Rick's brother on land, and a friend on Southern Cross sailing 160 nm behind. After sending brief messages they turned the devices off. The life raft carried several weeks worth of vital provisions but their emergency signaling devices had precious little battery power. They turned the devices on every two hours or so to save battery power.

The EPIRB signal set off an official SAR chain of command that began in Peru and was rerouted through Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) Alameda, California, where the U.S. Coast Guard fielded phone calls and coordinated via AMVER to divert a commercial ship to the life raft. Rick's text messages set off another effort, where several organizations and cruisers nets got involved. One cruisers net discovered the catamaran Rolling Stones only about 35 nm away, and vectored them to Raindancer's life raft.

Rolling Stones and the AMVER vessel both arrived near the raft about 9 hours after the sinking. Raindancer chose to evacuate to the catamaran rather than to a merchant vessel.

This story illustrates how the decision-making process was impacted by the wide variety of communication methods that were available to *Raindancer*, and how judicious use of multiple communication techniques can increase rescue options and assistance.

Prioritizing the safety of the crew of the VID may result in abandoning a vessel that is afloat and could possibly be saved. The decision to abandon is always made in the context of the situation at hand, taking into account the advantage of a RV nearby, environmental conditions including weather, seas, and the forecast, daylight vs. night, and crew parameters, as in the case of the abandonment and sinking of *Gunga Din* and rescue by *Desna* in the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race. Incident reviews after the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race⁵ stated:

⁵ [Incident Report Conducted Under the Aegis of US Sailing, the BROCC and The CCA](#)

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Gunga Din discovered flooding in the early hours of June 25, 2024. Wind and sea conditions were moderating after almost 500 miles of upwind sailing mainly in steep, short seas. The crew activated manual and electric bilge pumps and brought a high-capacity pump online. The source of the flooding was found to be an inaccessible hull breach under the mast step.

The pumps drew down the battery as the engine was out of commission due to a fouled fuel filter. At this point co-skipper Paul Cunningham issued an all-ships urgent Digital Selective Calling DSC VHF broadcast followed up with a pan-pan voice call to which they heard no reply. Bermuda only has facilities physically to assist vessels within 12 miles of the islands and Gunga Din was nearly 100 miles from Bermuda. Satellite phone calls to the Bermuda Race Fleet communications office, Bermuda Radio, and the Rescue Coordination Center Bermuda followed, which informed him that Desna had received their pan-pan call when it was 14-16 miles away and was proceeding toward their position. The sun came up and the solar panels helped battery charging and with the water level down, the crew eventually cut away the dining table with a battery-operated reciprocating saw and found water coming in through “slits in the hull” and “cracks extending to all directions.” The space was inaccessible and the flow of water increased when the boat had forward motion. Gunga Din established handheld VHF communications with Desna about four miles away, and Desna could see the distress icon on AIS as a target for their approach. Once Desna was on site about 1100, Gunga Din decided to abandon ship.

Gunga Din’s crew recognized that although they had pumped much of the water out of the boat temporarily, the hull damage threatened to become catastrophic, forward motion accelerated the flooding, and the solar panels would not be able to charge the batteries and keep the pumps running at night. To them the decision to abandon ship was obvious and prudent, during daylight, with moderate three- to four-foot swells, while RV Desna was standing by. Gunga Din’s life raft was deployed.

Once the RV is on scene, incident reviews demonstrate that the smoothest rescues occur once the skippers of the RV and VID have developed a mutually agreed-upon plan. Insufficient communications and planning can lead to confusion, as was subsequently seen in the rescue of VID *Gunga Din* by *Desna*:

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As they approached, Desna's crew was surprised to see Gunga Din floating at her waterline. They agreed that coming alongside would likely cause damage to both boats. They circled but were not sure what their role would be and asked what was needed of them. Gunga Din asked what they could offer. The situation was new to everyone involved. Desna was surprised to see the life raft being launched. Desna's crew felt they were improvising "on the fly" and would have preferred to have had a plan worked out with Gunga Din that they could have executed smoothly.

The collaborative process begins with the initial communications between the two, when the RV communicates its rescue response to the VID or when the RV arrives within communication range of the VID. The involved vessels determine a plan based upon the VID's needs and the manner in which the RV can assist, which may range from standing by, to transferring supplies or gear, or preparing to rescue the VID crew.

Once a decision is made, the operational plan is conducted with continual review; circumstances change and a change in plans may be required. Either way, the ability to communicate and plan clearly and precisely is key. Once the abandon ship decision has been made, the RV skipper typically assumes command of the rescue and provides clear requests and directives to the VID crew during the abandonment process and in the life raft or dinghy.

Injuries or medical needs may require the RV and VID to come alongside if conditions permit. Such an approach requires additional considerations to avoid significant damage to either boat (See chapter 4, Stage 3).

Review Team Consensus and Recommended Practices:

1. YTYCR should be discussed as part of SAS training; because incidents can happen to any nearshore or offshore vessel, skippers and afterguard should be knowledgeable about the processes of YTYCR.
2. The ability to conduct damage control and slow the emergency process allows more time to make decisions regarding self-rescue options or the need to abandon. The skipper has time to review options and decide whether or when to call a pan-pan or Mayday.
3. Acknowledging an impending need to abandon and call a Mayday early on, with follow-through communications via multiple techniques (VHF, satellite signaling and voice, and satellite messaging), will maximize potential rescue options.
4. Tradition and laws require that "A master or individual in charge of a vessel shall render assistance to any individual found at sea in danger of being lost, so far as

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the master or individual in charge can do so without serious danger to the master's or individual's vessel or individuals on board."

5. All effort should be made to ensure that the VID and RV are able to communicate directly as early as possible; a charged handheld VHF in the life raft should be part of the abandonment plan.
6. The decision to abandon is always made in the context of the situation at hand and must consider the advantage of a RV nearby, environmental conditions including weather, seas, and the forecast, daylight vs. night, and crew parameters.
7. Prioritizing the safety of the crew of the VID may result in abandoning a vessel that is afloat and could possibly be saved.
8. In most circumstances, the best method of transferring crew from the VID to the RV is via life raft (or dinghy). If possible, transfer all crew on one trip, as a second trip may be infeasible. Whether to embark aboard the RV midships or at the stern depends on boat orientation, boat design, and conditions.
9. The RV skipper must decide how to deliver the VID's crew safely ashore, sometimes including a decision to continue racing.

CHAPTER 4: FIVE STAGES OF YACHT-TO-YACHT CREW RESCUE

STAGE 1: COMMUNICATIONS AND DETERMINING LOCATION AND STATUS

Effective communication is the foundation of every successful rescue. Across all incidents, the difference between a smooth rescue and a dangerous delay frequently traced back to the quality, redundancy, and reliability of communications — both between vessels and with shore-side coordination centers.

Effective communication and electronic positioning equipment play a vital role in yacht-to-yacht rescues at sea. Singlehanded racing highlights how modern communications have improved the effectiveness of yacht-to-yacht crew rescues and how the fleet benefits from shoreside expertise. Rock-solid communication systems aboard the boats provide voice, digital, and tracking capabilities that link the fleet and offer a wide range of options and information. Race organizers collaborate with international SAR agencies, weather services, and oceanographic experts, making the needle in a haystack much more visible.

Digital and voice communication between vessels increases the likelihood that one yacht can assist or recover the crew of another. Throughout this study, carefully analyzed accounts revealed that technology tips the scale in favor of successful rescue. For example, many sailors have harnessed geosynchronous, low-, and mid-Earth-orbiting satellites to receive vital information and conduct long-distance communication. Similarly, creative, low-tech local communication has also proven beneficial. In one case, a singlehander sent his message by throwing a hammer at a capsized IMOCA 60 hull — signaling to the occupant that help had arrived. In another, a signal pennant was placed to protrude from a thru-hull in a capsized boat, signaling to the RV that the sailor was aboard.

In the 2020 Vendée Globe, Kevin Escoffier suffered a catastrophic structural failure when his yacht PRB snapped in half while racing about 840 nautical miles southwest of Cape Town, South Africa. Escoffier's IMOCA 60 slammed into a wave at 27 knots; the impact caused the bow to fold at a 90-degree angle resulting in catastrophic flooding and sinking in mere seconds. Escoffier barely had time to send a frantic text message to his shore team before his electronics died, saying: "I am sinking. This is not a joke. MAYDAY."

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After floating in a life raft for 11 hours in the South Atlantic, he was rescued by his rival, veteran skipper Jean Le Cam, after an extensive, coordinated search. Le Cam's daylight spotting of the raft and initial contact with Escoffier was lost when Le Cam veered off to shorten sail and get the engine started. Meanwhile, Race Direction called on three other competitors in the region to steer toward the vicinity of the EPIRB signal and implement a grid pattern search. As night fell and Le Cam continued tacking back and forth under moonlight, he noted the glimmer of what turned out to be the life raft's canopy lamp.

The wind was down a bit, but the seas remained confused and maneuvering was difficult. Le Cam steered his IMOCA 60 to the windward of the life raft, and the vessel started to gain sternway. Le Cam had a ring buoy and line ready, and when Escoffier was just a few meters away, he heaved him the ring. Both hauled in on the line and as the raft neared the stern of Yes We Cam, Kevin lunged for the stern grabbing onto a connecting rod that linked the two rudders. With an apology to Yes We Cam for intruding on his race, Escoffier was welcomed aboard. In good health, he sailed on as a passenger.

Satellite capabilities have transformed offshore communications, enabling nearly simultaneous emergency signaling to international rescue authorities (EPIRB or PLB), voice calls to race or rally organizations, and text messaging via dedicated messenger devices and social networks. 80% of offshore cruisers have Starlink (Ocean Cruising Club and Atlantic Rally for Cruisers data).

Emergency yacht-to-yacht communication can be broken down into three distinct phases:

- 1: The call for assistance
- 2: The search, including acknowledgement of the distress, VID coordinates, distance/time to VID
- 3: Onsite communications

Each of the three phases has a corresponding set of challenges, both technological and informational. The chosen communication methods will be determined by the available options and the distance between vessels.

1: The call for assistance

Fortunately, there's global support for rescues at sea. Maritime rescue services are composed of multiple agencies working together to assist all mariners in peril. However, coverage of these services varies drastically due to the remoteness of certain voyages and the services available in the nation with assigned jurisdiction. This is why, around the world, blue-water voyagers, especially singlehandlers, have such a well-deserved reputation for coming to the aid of one another.

A backbone of all ocean rescue efforts has been the international COSPAS-SARSAT system. It operates the EPIRB and PLB system and relays distress signals to regional Mission Control Centers (MCC), which in turn forward them to a local Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) that engages search and rescue services. In some parts of the ocean, where shipping is minimal and the range of available aircraft is limited, the RCC will work with race organizers and individual yachts to enable a rescue.

Phase 1 of a yacht-to-yacht rescue is, in its starkest form, a high-seas "cold call." Always unexpected and often unnerving, it sidelines the status quo. The caller is aboard a vessel in distress, and the recipient, just seconds before, had no inclination of what was about to transpire. Vital details are transmitted and must be accurately recorded. This is when a step-by-step, well-practiced emergency response plan pays off.

Whoever answers a Mayday call must be a capable data gatherer, ready to record details. Activating the recording function on a digital recorder, mobile phone, VHF radio, or tablet is helpful. During the initial communication, it helps to follow the journalist's habit of recording "who, when, where, and what." Trained rescue personnel zero in on specifics that establish crew and vessel conditions. Identify who's aboard and what communications and signaling equipment they have — EPIRB, PLB, AIS, VHF-DSC, sat phone, flares, masthead light, etc. Then set up a comms schedule and reconfirm the VID's position.

Key Information to Record

- Vessel identification: Name, Call Sign, and MMSI
- Location: Lat/Lon or bearing/distance from a known object
- Nature of distress: Fire, sinking, medical emergency, etc.
- Safety status: Number of people on board, assistance needed, available communications, signaling equipment, and life raft
- Vessel Description: Vessel size, hull color, type, make, length
- Timing: Time of the message

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Note: EPIRBs after mid-2022 also transmit this information as an AIS emergency signal, providing the data plus a location on chart plotters.

Often, a third party links a formal SAR agency, such as the U.S. Coast Guard, to other yachts and race organizers. When such communication involves multiple parties, it is important to clarify each person's role. In most cases, the official SAR agency quickly establishes the communications protocol and may ask nearby vessels to stand by and play a passive or active role.

It is also vital to ascertain the status of the VID. Fire and flooding can quickly overwhelm the vessel and even the best onboard comms gear. Life raft details, available signaling equipment (EPIRB, PLB, AIS), and whether a handheld VHF and/or satphone will be aboard, are important considerations.

2: The search

It is the navigator's job to determine the fastest route to intercept the VID. The navigator may also be the right person to maintain the communications schedule. During this time, if communication allows, the skipper of the RV and the skipper of the VID need to agree on how the crew transfer will be conducted, including the maneuvers each vessel will perform. In some cases, the skipper of the VID may be reluctant to abandon ship and may prefer a tow. Most sailboats are not designed to tow another vessel of similar size except in calm seas. Waiting for a commercial tow can be risky. When the weather deteriorates, towing and transferring crew becomes far more difficult.

Phase 2 brings multiple challenges. The first is to find the VID, and that process is streamlined when some or all electronics are operational. If both vessels have GPS, digital charting, AIS, radar, and a VHF radio, along with enough electrical capacity to keep them online, the rendezvous is expedited. But when the VID loses communication or goes dark electronically, the challenge increases. Add more wind and a building seaway, and things get much more complicated. A grid search may be in order. But if those aboard the foundering vessel have a charged handheld VHF radio, along with LED flashlights and a canister of flares, they would become a much brighter needle in the wave-strewn haystack.

Tapio Lehtinen on VID Asteria, a Gaia 36 sailing in the 2022 Golden Globe Race, describes the process of contacting Kirsten Neuschäfer aboard RV Minnehaha: "She then sailed past about half a mile to windward. She saw me once when I was waving the orange hypothermia bag with the paddle above the raft on top of a swell but then lost me again ... We then discussed over VHF how she was going to approach and get me aboard Minnehaha."

She furled in the genoa, lowered the main, started the engine and approached the raft to windward of me so I could throw the throwing line to her, which she put around a winch and pulled me alongside...

Sat comms are paramount: I was pleased with the order in which I grabbed the things to take into the raft. The absolute first priority is a satellite device, which lets the MRCC and, in my case, the race organisers know where I am. Even in remote waters, help is rarely more than two to four days away. You will not die in hunger or even in thirst during that time. An EPIRB, PLB, and ideally a satellite tracker and messaging device is your best friend... “

Kirsten Neuschäfer provides her perspective: "the biggest problem in finding him was that the sun rising just behind him in the northeast was the greatest deterrent in seeing him, as I was completely blinded. He tried to fire off 2 flares—one he misfired into the water, and the other I could not see. What he would really have needed was the orange smoke flare, which would have helped immensely in finding him. It was an eye-opener as to how invisible flares (and even bright colours) are in the daylight, especially when the sun is low behind the item being searched for—including his hypothermia bag that he was waving—which was completely invisible and not much higher than his orange raft.

By the time I could see him, I was already so close that I would have seen him with or without the hypothermia blanket, and as my angle to him and the sun changed.

The handheld VHF certainly helped in him being able to tell me that the sun was exactly behind him so that I could steer exactly toward the sun, and it was possibly a moral support to him as he was on it quite a lot, talking to me, even when I was still farther out—although the waves seemed to, at times, not even reach me—possibly because his batteries were going flat (although I can't be sure if they were or not—but it is worth keeping in mind that the radio comms should perhaps be limited to essential information for that reason).

And of course, the most critical element in finding him was his GPS position that had been communicated to me and was constantly being updated to me from the race control, as this information would have gotten me to him, irrespective of visibility issues.

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In conclusion, both parachute as well as smoke flares are important, and perhaps it would have been useful if he had had a GPS or YB3 (or other tracking/rescue) device that could have shown him his own position, which he could have relayed to me directly - for a situation where visibility is difficult.”

3: Onsite communications

Given the proximity of the vessels and the need for immediate decisions, clear communication is vital in the final stages of the rescue. Quick responses, precise maneuvering, and coordination among skippers are essential. Much of this plan should have been discussed in the lead-up to the encounter.

Details of the rescue process and crew transfer should be in place. Maintain VHF contact using a handheld VHF or a remote microphone in the cockpit. Shouting from boat to boat can be less effective, especially as weather and sea conditions worsen. If possible, delay the boat-to-boat transfer until daylight.

Once the crew rescue is complete and the skipper of the VID concurs, the skipper of the RV should contact the Rescue Coordination Center to report the outcome and whether the rescued crew will remain on board or a rendezvous with another SAR asset is needed. Record the time, location, and names of those taken aboard in the logbook.

Stage 1 Review Team Consensus and Recommended Practices:

1. Establish regular, two-way VHF communications between the VID and RV as soon as possible.
2. As many SAR providers say, “treat the first communications as if it may be the last, and be certain that the vessel’s position and time have been entered into your logbook.”
3. Committee consensus endorses the view that maintaining regular communication at each stage of a rescue enhances the chances of success. We therefore recommend equipping ocean-going vessels with the best available communication systems, as improvements in satellite-based voice and messaging systems, EPIRBs, AIS, and DSC have proven valuable. Advances in communication will hopefully reduce the number of vessels and sailors labeled as “lost at sea.” As with all tools, the operator’s skill is equally important.
4. When rescue communications involve multiple vessels and/or shoreside guidance, formalize communication times, modes, and radio relay requirements.
5. When one or more RVs are in the vicinity of a VID but have yet to make contact, implement an agreed-upon search pattern and hold regular coordination calls on VHF channel 16 or another designated frequency.

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6. During the abandon-ship process, transfer all portable communications equipment, position-fixing electronics, and flashlights to the life raft, along with extra batteries.
7. If multiple crew members have portable AIS units aboard the life raft, use one at a time to extend the lifespan of this valuable position-broadcasting technology.
8. Include an AIS-equipped signaling device and a PLB in the life raft gear; take the Yellow Brick satellite tracking and communication device aboard the raft.
9. In some cases, long-range aircraft circling over the vessel in distress can provide location information to the rescue boat.
10. Maintain communication with the Rescue Coordination Center and make use of other vessels in the area. Notify all when the rescue is completed.

STAGE 2: VESSEL RESPONSES AND PREPARATIONS FOR RESCUE

Responding to a Mayday and navigating to the VID are only the beginning. Incidents demonstrate that smoothly conducted rescues had a clear plan communicated, agreed upon, and prepared for by both vessels—before any action was taken. Rescues where VID abandonment begins before a coordinated plan is communicated and established carry the risk of running into trouble.

VHF was essential communication in most cases. As described in Chapter 3, initial contact with the RV was made directly by the VID via VHF, satphone, Starlink, or via relay from a shore facility or another vessel.

After contacting the U.S. Coast Guard, Buddy, a 44-foot trimaran en route to Puerto Rico in December 2022, put out an emergency call to Vamoose, a J/133 sailboat that happened to be only 8.5 miles away. Vamoose was on standby, waiting, until Buddy decided to abandon ship and asked for rescue, providing their position. Vamoose agreed, came to their location, and as Buddy abandoned ship into their 10-foot inflatable dinghy, Vamoose motored into position for the dinghy to drift down to them and the entire crew of Buddy, as well as their gear, were safely boarded.

Many RVs prepared for a rescue en route to the VID.

Before the Alliance rescue by Ceilidh in the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race, Ceilidh's crew stripped all non-working lines from the deck and sent them below to avoid a line overboard that might foul their prop. Additionally, they prepared by having the crew with bright lights on deck. All crew were harnessed on (the standard on the boat anyway).

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Most RVs, having arrived on scene, spent considerable time assessing the situation and discussing plans with the VID. In some cases, the VID skipper was still focusing more on saving the vessel than abandonment.

Following the Mayday from Alliance, Ceilidh and Banter, both several miles away, replied and altered course to Alliance. Aboard Alliance, the crew worked to stem the flooding, but also prepared to abandon ship. Alliance remained in regular VHF communication with Ceilidh and Banter as her crew finished their preparations to abandon, and as Ceilidh and Banter prepared to recover Alliance's crew from their life raft.

Most RVs conducted pre-rescue briefings:

Restive, a 48-foot wooden sloop, was in the Gulf Stream in 2015 as Sparky prepared for rescue. The plan was for Sparky to drift down onto the life raft from windward, approaching the raft on her port, leeward rail. At Sparky's port gate, two strong crew were positioned to secure the raft and manually haul the crew of Restive aboard. Another of Sparky's crew maintained communications between the boat and raft, while a fifth was positioned to guide the boarding crew aft and below to the cabin.

In the Charlotte Jane III rescue by Magic Dragon, RV Magic Dragon took around an hour to reach Charlotte Jane III, during which time they talked through the manoeuvre, rigged lines and ladders on the expected lee side, and focused on the task at hand.

Most RVs and VIDs agreed on a rescue plan; in some cases, they did not:

During the Gunga Din rescue by Desna in the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race, Desna's skipper was surprised to see Gunga Din's life raft being launched. Gunga Din's PIC then told them that Gunga Din's crew would enter the raft in two groups and that the raft would drift to leeward on a painter from Gunga Din, and Desna would get a line to the raft and pull the raft in. There was some discussion about what the Gunga Din crew should bring with them.

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Desna had plenty of food and water, but in hindsight foul weather gear would have been useful for those living on the deck of the overloaded Tartan 37. Desna's crew felt they were improvising "on the fly" and would have preferred to have had a plan worked out with Gunga Din that they could have executed smoothly. They thought that one transfer with the entire complement of seven would have been easier and better with fewer lines to contend with. They asked the subsequent Newport Bermuda Race abandonment review panel to recommend clear abandon ship procedures and protocols to improve communication and actions by both parties.

Deciding what to take from the VID to the RV was sometimes hit or miss:

The Alliance crew did take three "bricks" of water and a spare bag of protein bars, as Ceilidh had suggested they may not have enough supplies with all the extra sailors aboard.

But they later reported that not taking foul weather gear (and toothbrushes!) was regrettable.

Stage 2 Review Team Consensus and Recommended Practices:

1. The RV skipper and VID skipper should agree on a rescue plan, with clear communication and coordination between the VID and RV on decisions and actions. The VID skipper will notify the RV and call to abandon ship when he/she thinks it is time. Command of the abandonment process should be assumed by a person on scene. If the RV is onsite, this is usually the RV skipper, as site command is generally handed to the RV skipper once the VID declares "abandon ship." The VID skipper remains in command of their crew and the transfer vessel. From the time all crew are aboard the raft, the command burden falls on the RV skipper, who will determine the approach and execute the agreed-upon plan. The VID skipper continues communications with the RV and focuses on their crew and how best to assist the RV as it approaches and brings the VID crew on board.
2. While en route to the VID, the RV should prepare the vessel and crew for possible rescue of the VID's crew.
3. AIS may be a primary tool for determining the range and bearing to the VID; radar may be a useful location tool.
4. The VID's status will determine the RV's immediate role—whether to stand by while the VID continues procedures to save the vessel or to proceed with the VID crew rescue under the mutually agreed plan. The VID skipper should clearly assign crew to actions to save the vessel vs. preparing to abandon.

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5. Conduct an all-crew pre-rescue briefing on both vessels and ensure the VID crew and RV are ready for transfer before steps such as inflating the life raft.
6. For both the VID and RV: Ensure the boom is secure. At night, prepare lighting such as spreader lights that will assist if they will not blind the crew. Prepare the deck and remove hazards, e.g., lines, sails.
7. For the VID: Make assignments to maintain communications. Prepare the ditch bag and life raft for deployment at the agreed-upon abandonment location. Review supplies not known to be in the life raft and augment supplies of water, food, and first aid. Gather a throw rope and VHF, and, unless the RV is nearby, a VHF remote antenna, satellite communications equipment, spare batteries, signaling flag and mirror, fishing pole, and clothing to load into the raft.
8. Agree on what should be brought by the VID crew to the RV—e.g., VHF, ditch bag, knives, foul-weather gear, clothing, passports, water, food, fuel, eyeglasses, medications, EPIRB.
9. Know what is in the life raft, including a collapsible emergency VHF antenna and spare batteries for all devices.
10. Ensure the life raft(s) or dinghy is securely tied to the VID.
11. Upon RV arrival at the scene, if the VID is inverted, alert the crew by throwing a hard object (hammer or winch handle) at it.

STAGE 3: VESSEL ABANDONMENT AND APPROACH PROCESSES:

The physical mechanics of how the VID crew get off their vessel and how the RV positions itself are among the most technically demanding aspects of any rescue. Errors here—a raft deployed in the wrong position, an RV approaching from the wrong side, a painter cut too soon—and a controlled situation can escalate into a life-threatening one.

The RV and the VID each play distinct, critical roles in ensuring a safe and successful rescue. The rescue vessel will have already doused its sails, cleared its decks, and minimized surrounding hazards. It will have taken command on scene once the decision to abandon has been made and may first conduct a reconnaissance pass to confirm its approach and the mutually agreed rescue plan.

Across the 28 incidents, life rafts were used in 19 (68%), a dinghy in 3 (11%), and direct vessel-to-vessel transfer in 1 (4%). Crew in the water were recovered in 5 incidents (18%). Highly experienced crews who were confident and calm was characteristic of most of these successful incidents.

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Method of Transfer	# of Instances
Life raft	19 (68%)
Dinghy	3 (11%)
Swimming	5 (18%)
Boat to Boat	1 (4%)

Table 3: Methods of Crew Transfer

Offshore wind and wave conditions frequently made a life raft the preferred transfer vehicle. In only two incidents, during medical emergencies, a direct boat-to-boat transfer was accomplished using a bow approach to the VID's stern or quarter. Vessels lay abeam to the swells, allowing the two vessels to move more in sync than with bow or stern to the swells. Coming alongside risks rig entanglement, hull damage, and crew injury. Vessels with large windows on the topside are at even greater risk. There may be lines in the water that can foul the prop. These are some of the reasons a life raft transfer is most frequently chosen to transfer VID crew to the RV.

As Magic Dragon approached Charlotte Jane III sailing in the 2021 ARC, the severity of the situation became apparent. “We made one attempt to get close to them,” explained the skipper, “but both boats were being thrown around so much that there was a real risk of rigs clashing, even from several meters away” and the attempt to bring the vessels boat-to-boat was abandoned. Charlotte Jane III’s drogue created another obstacle, obscuring the approach. It became clear that getting into the life raft was the only sensible option for the transfer.

Often the chosen transfer vehicle, a life raft poses challenges as the crew of *Cinderella di Sanremo* wrote about their rescue of *Karolina Viking*, sailing in the 2024 ARC Rally 300 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands:



Crew of the Leopard 45 Karolina Viking climb aboard their life raft after water ingress flooded an engine room. (Cinderella di Sanremo)

“We realized that in all our sailing courses, (including the Royal Yachting Association masters licensure and US Sailing Association’s classes), none of us had ever practiced or even discussed how to [rescue a crew from] a life raft. In those classes, we discussed how to deploy a life raft; where to position a life raft while abandoning ship; how to enter a life raft; and how to hoist people out of a life raft. But no one had a class where they discussed how a boat was supposed to approach a life raft and bring it alongside. So, we looked it up on YouTube. Nothing. You can find a video on how to overhaul the cooling system on a ’57 Studebaker, but there were no videos on how to pick up a life raft.”

In the case of direct boat-to-boat transfer, sails and other soft, bulky packages have been used as padding on the VID, reducing potential damage as the RV approaches and transfer occurs:

A crewmember developed appendicitis aboard Denali, racing to Bermuda in the 1988 Newport Bermuda Race. As soon as the medical issue was diagnosed and a need for quick surgery was identified, emergency communications were carried out using SSB, VHF, and USCG-medical link. RV Karyatis, a 70-foot motorsailer, heard the discussion over the radios and immediately volunteered to proceed at high speed under engine to take the stricken crew to Bermuda. Karyatis dropped out and proceeded to rendezvous immediately. The need to transfer the ailing crew meant the VID needed to be brought up to the RV, and a decision was made to bring the bow of Denali up to the quarter of Karyatis. Denali laid sails in turtles over the rail as fendering to minimize damage, the boats touched but did

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not tie together. The two crew who transferred were manhandled by crew on both boats. Also, a second life raft was transferred using lines as security. The skipper of Denali did a great job of assigning responsibilities: One to steer, one to prep the boat and oversee transfer, and one on comms.

Using a dinghy worked well in two incidents in very calm conditions, but dinghies are rarely the preferred transfer vehicle if the vessel also has a life raft. For example, a dinghy was used in calm conditions in the doldrums during the rescue of *Flow* on a Pacific crossing in 2024:

Flow had only a crew of two, and they were getting tired. They were in the doldrums when they heard a bang one night. The next day, their rudder broke a foot below the bottom of the hull. They might have hit a half-submerged shipping container, as damage was visible near the rudder shaft. Oatmeal Savage was in contact via Starlink and arrived on scene. A slow tow was unsuccessful. They were not in shipping routes and didn't have enough food to buddy boat for weeks. It was calm, with no wind, and they realized they had to rescue now, not wait for the weather to deteriorate; the sun was going down, and using the hydrovane to steer wasn't a good option. A dinghy was launched, shuttling back and forth with gear, running the dinghy back three times with fuel and their possessions, loading bags from the swim grid into the cockpit, then into the RV. "It was quite an effort, but I know it was a gift to be able to have the luxury of time to be able to grab some things... It was heartbreaking over the next few days to hear something like 'Oh, I must have left that on the boat' or 'Why didn't I grab that from the boat?' "

On the VID, the life raft can be deployed from a midship position or from the stern. The vessel's attitude relative to the swells can affect deployment considerations. A vessel lying beam to the waves and swell will have less stern pitch, and one lying bow to the waves and swell will have less beam roll. Deployment from the stern could make it difficult to move from the VID to the life raft because of swells, winds, and waves, which might require a leap from the vessel to the raft. The crew of *Restive* could only jump from the stern to the life raft when a wave briefly brought the raft close. However, vessels with open or sugar-scoop transoms might prefer stern deployment.

James G. Blaine was aboard Restive and wrote in his online blog Perspectives: "We didn't have a lot of good options. Sparky's captain radioed that it was too dangerous to try to rescue us from the water, and the safest alternative was to try to get us from the life raft (which was attached to the stern, enclosed in an alarmingly small yellow case). As

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Sparky appeared out of the mist, bobbing like a toy boat in the waves, we gathered in the cockpit, where George asked us what we thought we should do. Each of the four of us said, emphatically, that the time had come to leave the boat. George listened quietly, clearly struggling with a decision that for the rest of us had become evident. Watching him, I suddenly understood how traumatic it is for a captain to abandon his ship. 'Okay,' he said. 'Let's deploy the life raft. Abandon ship.' It was hard at first to see Sparky through the rain, a ghostly mirage whose mast kept disappearing in the trough of a wave. As she hove to about 200 yards off our port side, her five-person crew readied themselves and waited. Dave climbed to the stern, opened the yellow casing, tossed us the ribbon-like red line, which we cleated amidship, and flung out the life raft. Although it is designed to inflate automatically on contact with water, none of us had ever done this before, and so we watched with some apprehension. (I'm told you can practice the maneuver in a swimming pool, but that just doesn't seem the same).

As soon as it hit the water, the amorphous blob of material began to inflate with a reassuring whoosh, and—like a carnival balloon that turns into a latex dog to the delight of small children—it gradually assumed the form of a circular raft, about eight feet in diameter and two feet deep. We struggled to haul the now-inflated raft to the middle of the boat for easy entry, but no matter what we tried, we could not pull it around Restive's heaving stern. Our only option was to bring the raft as close as possible to the stern, keeping it always free of the boat, and then, when a wave had brought the raft to its nearest point, hurl ourselves one by one into it—a septuagenarian high dive, backwards and blind, into a small pool.

'For me jumping into that raft was the most frightening part of the entire event. Not being able to jump without turning around and throwing myself backwards into where I hoped the raft was, was terrifying. A total leap of faith.' ”

There were concerns that a rapidly sinking boat could cause a raft to sink: *Asteria's* slip-knotted painter became undone, and Lehtinen had to leap over lifelines into the water to reach his raft, and potential sinking of the raft was also a concern on *OEX*, a Santa Cruz 70 participating in the 2017 Transpacific Yacht Race.

Life raft data: The most common worldwide international standard for leisure/recreational life raft construction and testing is the IS9650-2022

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standard. Life rafts built to this standard are available with capacities from 4-person to 16-person. There are several points in the standard that are directly applicable to an operator's knowledge base that might affect a crew's life raft usage if needed.

These include painter lines:

- I. Minimum length 9 m—this means 9 m (29.5 ft) of line to pull before the raft will inflate.
- II. There is no weak link in a painter line—The breaking load of the painter line shall be not less than 750 kg (1,653 lb) for life rafts up to 12-person and 1,000 kg (2,204 lb) for life rafts up to 16-person. The attachment patch must have a break load of at least 50 kg more than the painter line.

A life raft is built for stability with ballast and drogues and will drift surprisingly slowly. RV skippers describe the need to allow enough time for the abandoned vessel to drift safely away from hazards before approaching the life raft.

Understanding the life raft's contents is helpful; deficiencies in the life raft's contents impeded some of the rescues (see page 30: Stage 2 Review Team Consensus and Recommended Practice, recommendation 7).

Tapio Lehtinen on VID Asteria describes the process of visually connecting Kirsten Neuschäfer aboard RV Minnehaha: Location signaling: "It wasn't easy for Kirsten to spot the raft between the swells. I needed a way to be more visible, and holding the high-visibility hypothermia bag up on a paddle wasn't very stable. How about a telescopic fishing rod and a high-visibility flag, a balloon, or a kite which would have flown even higher? Collapsible emergency VHF antennae are now available that would have made me more visible and also helped with my radio transmissions."

The life raft's drogue will stream to windward, positioning the canopy to leeward, facing downwind. In some conditions, the RV could consider approaching the life raft from leeward of the raft rather than from windward as in a standard MOB drill.

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Magic Dragon discussed a plan for rescue. Coming alongside was out of the question due to the conditions and we considered heaving-to upwind of them, leaving Charlotte Jane III alee. Then the crew of Charlotte Jane III would get into their life raft, cast themselves off, and we would pick them up out of the water. Once the crew were off the boat, they freed the raft and hoped it would drift away from Charlotte Jane III, making it easier for Magic Dragon to approach—but it didn't. Even without deploying the drogue, the raft made much less leeway than expected. Conditions did not allow a rescue to the windward side of the raft. Once in the life raft, Magic Dragon was concerned that there was a very real chance of crushing the life raft beneath the 30-ton Oyster given the sea state, so they manoeuvred to leeward of the raft rather than to windward.

Meanwhile, *Sparky* successfully executed an approach to the raft from windward, rescuing *Restive*. Multiple passes, three to four, are often necessary. The canopy of the raft can be cut to facilitate transfer of the crew

From Perspectives, an online blog by James G. Blaine: "We were amazed by the raft's sturdiness. With a cover for bad weather and a pump for high water, we felt secure against the elements, becoming practically giddy with relief. David brought us back to reality. 'All we have to do now,' he said, pointing to Sparky a couple of hundred yards away, 'is get from here to there and then figure out how to get on board. Before dark.'

Sparky, whose crew had practiced their rescue procedure three times in anticipation, circled to get downwind of us and as close as possible. "Too fast," George thought, worried we would be caught by her bow. But the helmsman held his course, and the captain threw us a line, which landed almost beyond our reach. Fred reached over and hauled it in, and we struggled to hold on in the heavy seas. But we felt it pulling relentlessly from our hands, until we had to let go. Sparky circled again.

As Sparky approached us again, we watched her crew arrange themselves to haul us on board and vowed to hang on to the line this time. In the raft, the calm that had come over us from the time Dave discovered the compromised rudder bearings continued to prevail. I had become aware of two parallel tracks in my mind: on one, I knew there was a not insignificant chance I wouldn't survive; on the other, I was convinced that, whatever odds Vegas might be laying, I was going to make it. Somehow, the combination—neither denying the reality nor succumbing to the

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inevitable—kept me peaceful and focused. That was true for all of us. If we had not been, things might have turned out differently.

Sparky's skipper again threw the line. Fred reached over and snared it, and each of us grabbed onto either the line or someone holding it, as Sparky's crew hauled us slowly toward them, both vessels rocking vigorously in the sea. We came up amidships, and Fred, the closest, scrambled up the hull until Rob and Jack could grip him under both arms and haul him to safety. One by one we followed, waiting till a wave brought us close, then clambering up till we felt the grip of men who had come eight miles to rescue us.

The captain went last, hurling himself over the lifeline and landing on Jack, who pulled him over and onto his body. Safely on deck, George burst into tears."

Stage 3 Review Team Consensus and Recommended Practice:

1. In 67% of transfers, the life raft was the transfer vehicle of choice, underlining the importance of life raft training at SAS courses.
2. Do not attempt direct vessel-to-vessel transfer if other options exist.
3. Do not elect to have the crew intentionally go into the water; the review panel does not recommend attempting to swim from the VID to the RV.
4. Beware: The tension on the painter may be high due to wind and seas, the weight of the water ballast and crew as they embark, and it is difficult to grab onto the slippery painter line with bare hands.
5. The raft may inflate upside down. Knowing how to right a capsized life raft is an essential skill.
6. Rafts are supplied with a cutting tool by the entrance of the life raft to cut the painter. Be sure to control the life raft upon inflating it, and do not cut the painter until you are in the raft. Keep tension on the painter, especially as the ballast bags fill and the crew enter the raft at the VID and exit at the RV.
7. Remove all EPIRBs or PLBs from the VID and life raft before abandoning or consider leaving an EPIRB or Yellow Brick aboard the VID to facilitate salvage or to avoid a risk to navigation. If a signaling device remains on the VID, to reduce the risk of a second RV endangering its crew and vessel by initiating an unnecessary rescue due to a false emergency signal, devices must be registered to the VID, authorities must be notified, and a VHF notice must be broadcast locally.

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8. Rescues are much more difficult in the dark. Environmental conditions, weather and daylight all play a role. Rescue timing needs to take impending weather changes, loss of daylight, and other factors into account.
9. The life raft should stay securely attached to the VID until all crew are on board and the raft is positioned to drift safely away.

STAGE 4: BRINGING RESCUED CREW ONBOARD THE RESCUE VESSEL

The VID and RV each have important and independent roles in ensuring a safe and successful rescue. The VID will have already doused its sails, cleared its decks, and minimized surrounding hazards. The RV will have taken command on scene once the decision to abandon has been made and may first conduct a reconnaissance pass to confirm their approach and the mutually agreed rescue plan.

Recovering VID crew from a life raft onto a sailing yacht requires planning, adaptability, and disciplined execution. Major elements and planning considerations for a successful rescue, in order, include:

1. Selecting the recovery location (alongside at the rail or over the transom).
2. Securing the yacht to the life raft.
3. Determining how to bring VID crew aboard and assist them.
4. Managing both crews throughout the evolution.

Environmental conditions, especially wave state, along with vessel design and crew capability, drive both planning and execution. Weather and environmental conditions along with Murphy's Law (cascading errors) may challenge crews during the rescue. The crew of the rescuing boat must first decide whether to bring the VID crew aboard alongside the beam or over the transom.

Many sailors worry that the transom may rise and fall dangerously, endangering the heads of VID crew. However, with sails down and vessel drifting, most sailing yachts lie beam-to wind and therefore beam-to waves. In this orientation, a life raft alongside the rail will move significantly up and down relative to the rolling yacht; boarding over the transom might be more manageable, as the motion involves rolling rather than pitching.

If waves are not perpendicular to the wind, or if seas are breaking, the stern can become hazardous. Older yacht designs with extended or tapered transoms increase this risk. Conversely, modern hulls with pronounced forward chines can also become dangerous during heavy rolling. No universally correct technique exists. Yachts with open transoms often favor stern recovery, as the step-up from the raft to the RV is easier. Boats with sugar-scoop or ladder-equipped transoms have also used a stern recovery to good effect. Short-handed crews may favor a beam recovery, as it reduces their need to lean outboard.

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In the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race, the crew of VID Alliance transferred to RV Ceilidh via the transom platform. Due to the sea state, it required help from two strong crew members from Ceilidh to hold the raft and grab the Alliance crew one at a time when the waves were right. During the transfer the upper tube on the life raft was punctured, most likely by the swim ladder on Ceilidh's transom.



The life raft and crew of S/V Alliance at RV Ceilidh's stern (Ryan Mann)

Alternatively, RV Vamoose, a J/133 sailboat en route to Puerto Rico in December 2022, boarded the crew of VID Buddy, a 44-foot trimaran, at the beam. As written in the Royal Gazette⁶, Willie Dresser described events in Scuttlebutt: "The conditions were 15-foot breakers with 53-knot gusts recorded ... Once ready, we took them at the gate on the port side and rounded over to them, so they were on leeward not getting the spray ... We threw them a line and pulled them into the break of the lifelines at midship where Geoff, Tim, and Chris pulled all three of the Buddy crew on board."

The crew must rely on their seamanship experience and judgment and select the method best suited to the vessel and conditions. If the raft lies in a poor position, the crew can reposition it, though doing so may be difficult. The *Alliance* rescue of *Ceilidh*

⁶ [The Royal Gazette: "Trimaran crew tells of dramatic rescue"](#)

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in the Newport Bermuda Race is illustrative. From the February 2025 incident report by US SAILING, the BRF, and The CCA:

At one point, Alliance, Ceilidh, and Banter agreed that some of the Alliance crew would ride on Ceilidh, and the rest on Banter. Aboard Alliance, the crew were prepared to board the raft. They inflated the raft, and positioned it off the open transom of the J/122. In the seas, it took two strong fellows to hold onto the raft while others boarded it. All were tethered to the painter when leaving Alliance and entering the raft. The hand-held VHF became the new communications for the duration of the raft trip. They did take three “bricks” of water and a spare bag of protein bars, as Ceilidh had suggested they may not have enough supplies with all the extra sailors aboard. All the Alliance crew reported the abandon ship maneuver went smoothly and without panic. They attribute this to their training as a crew in preparation for the race, and their experience in a raft at Safety at Sea training. They cut the raft’s painter with a knife around 0340.

Ceilidh could see the raft with the lights held by the crew on deck. Notably, they carefully approached the raft to evaluate the most seamanlike way to recover the crew onto Ceilidh. They took a first reconnaissance approach, and saw that the raft had a drogue attached and took further maneuvers to avoid a possible entanglement with the prop. Ceilidh used a “throw bag” to connect with the raft. The throw bag line was connected to the raft. The crew found it effectively impossible to pull the raft to Ceilidh by hand, most likely due to the water ballast bags on the raft. Ceilidh put the throw rope on a primary winch and was able to grind the raft to its transom. Again, with the sea state, it took two strong people to help the Alliance crew disembark the raft; they had to hold the raft and grab the Alliance crew, one at a time, when the waves were right. Eric and Mary emphasized how important it is to be clipped on to the receiving boat before attempting the crossing.

The chosen recovery location determines the final RV approach to the life raft or dinghy. Contact between the life raft and the RV can be facilitated by using a throwline from the life raft, especially when approaching the RV from the leeward side, or by deploying a drift line buoyed by a fender from the RV, especially when approaching from the windward side. Ensure that the RV’s propeller is not fouled by any lines, e.g., the life raft’s drogue, sheets, or sails. It will be surprisingly difficult to pull the life raft to the RV; anticipate the need to deploy winches or similar devices for assistance.

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Similarly, if the RV is picking up crew in the water, anticipate crew exhaustion and the need to assist or hoist them aboard. Failing to fit crotch straps to life jackets was a serious oversight in at least one incident:

An immediate problem for the crew swimming to Yankee Girl from Swan 44 Elusive, returning to the U.S. after the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race, was that there were no crotch straps for their PFDs. Consequently, upon entering the water, their life jackets rode up above their shoulders. When they eventually did reach the life sling, they were not able to get the sling over their head and around them, but had to simply hold onto the line. [They] were hoisted aboard Yankee Girl using a halyard attached to the life jacket harnesses.

A reconnaissance circle around the life raft at a safe distance to refine the approach and identify hazards proved valuable. The RV must give the life raft wide clearance, especially upwind of it, to avoid its drogue, which may be 30 m (100 feet) away; the life raft entry will be oriented to leeward, potentially complicating communication and line handling. In at least one case, occupants cut away the canopy to improve access and coordination.

A life raft resists movement due to its ballast system and the weight of its occupants. It is essentially stationary, so the RV can maneuver their yacht accordingly. If motoring upwind or downwind, the rescuing crew can secure the raft alongside and then reposition it aft if required. If motoring across the wind or waves, or drifting downwind with the wind abeam, the rescuing crew typically secures the raft near the beam max or slightly aft of midships.

A pitching bow or stern in an upwind or downwind approach presents a serious hazard (similar to man-overboard recoveries). In that case, the RV can maneuver close to, but not directly alongside the raft (approximately 7–20 feet), and use a throwline to connect the raft to their boat (see below).

In incidents involving a life raft, the rescuing crew secured the raft to the yacht before transferring occupants. A ballasted raft and a boat move differently in waves, and the forces required to keep them together can be substantial. Rescuers should prepare strong, easy-to-handle lines in advance. Throw bags often prove unsuitable because of their slippery lines; a spare spinnaker sheet or a moderate mooring line works better.



Peter Goss on RV Aqua Quorum rescues Raphaël Dinelli from VID Algimouss in the Southern Ocean.
(RAAF)

Aqua Quorum's 1996 rescue of Raphaël Dinelli on VID Algimouss is recognized as one of the most demanding rescues in the Southern Ocean; sailing upwind in a gale was the first accomplishment! Peter Goss on Aqua Quorum suggests that without the help of the RAAF aircraft he probably have never been able to find the life raft in the sea conditions. In preparation, personal safety tether lines were arranged along the deck edge before the final approach so they could very quickly be clipped onto the life raft, enabling a physical connection as soon as the RV & life raft were alongside. A long line was towed behind the RV with fenders attached as an extra option for Dinelli to grab hold of if the RV sailed past.

The raft occupants must secure the line, as loads exceed what anyone can safely hold by hand. Suitable attachment points include the painter or perimeter grab lines. In many cases, the rescuing crew had to winch the raft closer. They should lead lines to provide

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a fair lead to a primary winch or pass a properly led secondary line to the raft for securing.

Great care must be taken when deciding what to do if one is leaving a floating VID or life raft behind. It is usually too difficult to drag a raft onto the deck of the RV, and the raft can be punctured in multiple places to sink it. The VID might be sinking quickly or be scuttled. A signaling device (EPIRB or PLB) may be left behind but the risk of a second RV endangering its crew and vessel by initiating an unnecessary rescue due to a false emergency signal should be mitigated (see page 37: Stage 3 Review Team Consensus and Recommended Practice recommendation 7).

In a singlehander-to-singlehander rescue, personal safety tethers were arranged along the deck edge before the final approach so they could quickly be clipped onto the life raft. Also, a long line was towed behind the RV with fenders attached as an extra option for the victim to grab hold of if the RV sailed past the victim.

Before beginning the transfer, the crew should open lifeline gates as required and clip RV crew in with tethers.

Rescued crew often gather near the boarding area, in the way of the rescuers. They may need to be guided away to a designated location to keep the working area clear while maintaining communication and reassurance. Rescued crew should follow the orders of the RV's skipper, e.g., to go below and keep the deck free. (see *Restive/Sparky*).

Finally, both crews must independently confirm that all persons are accounted for once the transfer is complete.

In some cases, the crews must shuttle a life raft between the VID and the RV, transferring occupants on two or more trips. Situations that may require a staged life raft transfer include the inability of the life raft to accommodate the entire crew of the VID, skippers' choice in the case of two rafts to execute the transfer one raft at a time for simplicity, or skippers' decision to move additional supplies along with the occupants, requiring multiple trips.

In this evolution, the crew controls the raft with lines from both vessels while wind and sea conditions carry it between them. A typical sequence proceeds as follows:

1. The distressed vessel secures the raft with a long line (such as an anchor rode).
2. The crew loads half of the occupants into the raft.
3. Wind and seas carry the raft and the rescue skipper maneuvers to receive it.
4. The rescue crew brings the occupants aboard.

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5. The crew secures a second long line to the raft.
6. The distressed vessel hauls the raft back using its original line.
7. The remaining occupants board the raft.
8. The crew retrieves the raft again using the second line.

This method creates a controlled shuttle between the two vessels. A well-documented example occurred during the 2008 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, when *Merit* rescued the crew of *Georgia* in 25-30 knots of wind and 4-6 foot seas. John Jourdane described the operation in an article on the CCA website:

“The Georgia crew attached the life raft painter to an anchor rode and placed seven of their 14 crew in it. The wind and seas carried the raft downwind, and Merit maneuvered to receive it. The seven crew transferred aboard Merit. Merit then secured its own rode to the raft, and Georgia hauled the raft back. The remaining seven crew boarded, and Merit retrieved them on the second pass.”

This technique demands precise coordination and strong seamanship from both vessels regarding helm control, line management, and crew readiness on the distressed vessel: The helmsman on the rescue boat must hold a steady position relative to the other boat while the raft connects the two vessels. Crews on both vessels must tend both lines continuously and prevent excessive tension or slack; tight lines increase shock loads and slack lines risk fouling the RV's propeller; remaining crew must prepare in advance and board quickly when the raft returns, minimizing the time they must maintain position.

Stage 4 Review Team Consensus and Recommended Practices:

1. Ideally, the crew transfer will take place in a single event, although multiple trips may be necessary depending on the capacity of the raft/dinghy, the amount of gear, and the number in the crew.
2. Boarding via the transom or at the beam is dependent on boat orientation, boat design and conditions.
3. A reconnaissance approach prior to the rescue to assess and test the RV approach and rescue options should be considered.
4. A life raft, designed for stability with ballast and drogues and carrying hundreds of pounds of crew, is exceedingly and surprisingly difficult to move. Plan to move the rescue boat toward the raft and have winches able to pull and secure a raft next to the rescuing boat.
5. It is best to assume the raft does not move, and the RV must make an approach to the raft, drifting the RV down to the raft or motoring to it has worked well. Use

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of a fender on a long floating drift line from the RV, or throw lines from the raft, can help initiate contact between RV and life raft.

6. Rafts lie with their drogue to windward. The RV should approach with this and other potential in-water hazards in mind. Consider retrieving the drogue and its 30-meter painter to eliminate the risk of entanglement. Rafts will lie with the canopy door to leeward, opposite the drogue. Crew in the raft can cut away the canopy once near or attached to the RV, as this makes it easier to board the RV.
7. Plan where to bring the raft alongside the RV. The boat's pitching motion may make the stern dangerous. The leeward side may reduce the deck-to-raft distance.
8. Rarely, bringing the vessels together is necessary. If the vessels must make physical contact, deploy bagged or turtled sails as fenders, approach the vessel ahead's quarter, and attach safety lines to the transferring crew's life harnesses.
9. Assume a rescued crewmember will require assistance to get from the raft to the rescue boat. It is difficult to move from a squishy raft up to the rail of a boat, plus the crew may be waterlogged and very tired. Plan to use a halyard, or many strong arms to assist each crewmember.
10. The rescuing crew, if numerous enough, should have one team bringing the rescued crew onboard with a second team providing immediate aftercare to the rescued crewmembers.

STAGE 5: POST-RESCUE EXPERIENCES AND ISSUES

The job isn't over when the abandoning crews board the RV. There are a number of important post-rescue issues to consider such as care and feeding of unplanned overnight guests. Other items to consider include communications to SAR and families, medical assessments, rationing of food and water, watch assignments, leadership issues (e.g., VID's skipper), impact of additional passengers and weight on vessel systems, insufficient life raft capacity and request for other vessels to accompany the RV.

Aboard *Pyewacket*, following the retrieval of the abandoning crew of the VID OEX in the 2017 Transpacific Yacht Race, it was noted that a few of the crew appeared to be in shock. Taking a crew aboard after a sinking, the physical and mental conditions of the crew of the VID become apparent, but not necessarily all at once.

After the rescue of *Alliance* in the 2024 Newport Bermuda race, *Ceilidh* was packed with nine rescued crew members in addition to the seven racing crew, and it took 52 hours to reach port. Some described it as the worst 52 hours of their lives.



Some of the 16 crew aboard the 40-foot *Ceilidh* (Eddie Doherty)

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In an interview, RJ, *Ceilidh*'s watch captain, postulated that after resuming racing, the additional weight of the VID crew caused significant wear and tear on the yacht as it proceeded down the race course. From the [February 2025 Incident Report](#) by US Sailing, the BROCC, and the CCA:

As it turns out, Ceilidh did have a few issues during the remainder of the race. Mid-morning the same day as the rescue, the Ceilidh crew noticed their top rudder bearing flange had broken three of four bolts holding it to the surrounding fiberglass. RJ scrounged fittings from around the boat and, with just a portable electric drill, was able to re-affix the flange with eight screws that held enough to get to the dock. Nonetheless, Ceilidh did call Banter to explain that they may have an errant upper rudder issue, and Banter stood by, monitoring the situation, along with one or more other boats calling in that they would monitor too. Ceilidh had a 10-person raft with 16 persons aboard.

Additionally, it was reported that sails and running rigging were more heavily loaded, beyond their usual working loads. *Banter* and other boats maintained communications with *Ceilidh* until arrival in Bermuda.

Stage 5 Review Team Consensus and Recommended Practices:

1. A medical assessment of the VID crew is paramount. Be alert that VID crew may be in shock or hypothermic or have first aid issues, including scrapes and bruises. Physical injuries might mask emotional and psychological trauma that the VID crew has incurred through the loss of their vessel and dangerous rescue process. Psychological and spiritual distress may increase after rescue, and the emotional component of the loss of the VID may linger.
2. After rescue, the rescued crew will undoubtedly need to alert their families and shore contacts that they are safe. Presumably, their destination has been established, unless there is a plan to have them picked up by a cruise ship or merchant ship. The RV will be communicating with shore-based organizations to report their intentions, a new crew manifest, ETA, medical reports, status of provisioning and water, etc.
3. The RV should also report the status of the VID (sank, afloat, EPIRB status, etc.), and communication with any accompanying buddy vessels will continue.

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4. The captain of the RV is fully in charge of the RV and its expanded crew and will establish a revised watch plan. If the yachts are racing or cruising to the same destination, a decision should be made by the captain of the RV as to whether the combined crews continue on to the final destination. If the RV is a race vessel, a decision will be made whether to continue racing. The decision to continue racing is dependent on the condition of the VID crew, number of injuries, weather forecast considerations, and provisioning considerations. If there is a decision to continue racing, the crew of the now-rescued VID will need to stand down and not contribute to the racing of the RV.
5. The crew of the RV should get priority bunk assignments, except in the case of medical issues among the rescued crew. The crew of the VID can contribute to tasks below deck, such as cooking, cleanup, bilge pumping, etc. They can also be designated as rail riders, with their own watch system.
6. If crew member(s) of the VID require medical attention that cannot be provided by the crew of the RV, the decision may be made to rendezvous with available resources in the area. This could be a cruise ship, merchant ship, or SAR.

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNICATION OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

The review team hopes that the data within this report and the Recommended Practices will be used by SAS course directors and instructors, offshore race administrators, and the media to help prepare sailors for a YTYCR. Furthermore, the review team hopes that offshore sailors will incorporate this information into their offshore preparations, station bills, and pre-departure discussions.

Potential Use

CATEGORY	ENTITY	USE
Recommended Practices	SAS Course online part 1 or other SAS courses	Insert teaching points into rendering assistance module
Recommended Practices	SAS Course hands-on part 2	Insert teaching points into morning or afternoon discussions
Recommended Practices	Races	Direct skippers to study Recommended Practices
Station Bill	SAS Courses, Races	For skippers
Video panel discussion (YTYCR principals, research team members, SAS leaders, race organizers)	SAS Courses, Races	Students and participants to view outside course or as part of NOR
On-site YTYTCR Protocol	SAS Courses, Races	Handout, lecture item or group discussion if created
Articles	Yachting magazines and websites	Incident reviews illustrate recommended practices, and can be published for offshore community awareness. A 2–4-page article can discuss the report, process and findings in more depth

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARIES OF INCIDENTS

Algimouss was sailing in the 1996 Vendee Globe when skipper Raphaël Dinelli informed race organizers that he was sinking after a pitchpole. He was forced to abandon the vessel as it sank under him, boarding a life raft that had been dropped by the Australian Air Force. Seas were large, with severe gale-force winds of 45-50 knots. RV *Aqua Quorum*, skippered by Peter Goss, was 180 miles away and had to turn around and sail 180 miles to windward in the Southern Ocean gale. Handheld VHF communications were possible but difficult due to line of sight, and sight of the life raft was lost when only 2 wavelengths away. The RV was hand-steered under headsail only to the weather side of the life raft, and personal safety tether lines were arranged along the deck edge before the final approach so they could be quickly clipped onto the life raft for a physical connection as soon as the RV was alongside. A long line was towed behind the *Aqua Quorum* with fenders attached as an extra option to grab hold of if the RV sailed past. Selected sources:

Independent: [How We Met: Pete Goss and Raphael Dinelli](#)

Outside: [Godforsaken](#)

[The Adventures: Pete Goss 1996/97 Vendee-Globe](#)

Alliance was racing in the 2024 Newport Bermuda race in 18-20 knots SW winds and 6-foot seas, when, at 0248 hours, she struck an unknown object. It resulted in loss of steering, a large breach in the hull, and uncontrollable flooding. She immediately put out a VHF Mayday to nearby race boats. *Ceilidh* and *Banter*, each several miles away, responded and changed course to assist. At 0340, with the lights of *Ceilidh* and *Banter* in sight, the crew of *Alliance* boarded their life raft. By 0406 all of *Alliance*'s crew were aboard *Ceilidh*. With 16 persons aboard, *Ceilidh* resumed racing, finishing 48 hours later. *Alliance* sank shortly after the rescue. Selected sources:

[Incident Reports: Reviews of Three Newport-Bermuda Sinkings](#)

Asteria, a Gaia 36, was sailing in the 2022 Golden Globe Race 450 miles southeast of South Africa in a comfortable Force 3 ENE wind when Tapio Lehtinen was awakened by a loud bang. He clambered out of his bunk into almost knee-deep water rushing into the cabin from under the companionway ladder and engine room, leaving just enough time to abandon ship and jump into his life raft. Race organizers facilitated contact with Kirsten Neuschäfer aboard RV *Minnehaha*, who sailed 100 miles to rescue Tapio. *Minnehaha* approached the raft to windward and accepted a throw line, which was secured around a winch to pull the raft alongside. *Minnehaha* was met by the bulk carrier *Darya Gayatri*, and Tapio was transferred aboard. Selected sources:

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Successful Southern Ocean rescue, Golden Globe sailor Tapio Lehtinen

Yachting Monthly: [Tapio Lehtinen: Lessons from my Golden Globe Rescue](#)

Yachting World: [Golden Globe skipper Tapio Lehtinen rescued](#)

Buddy, a 44-foot trimaran, was en route to Puerto Rico in December 2022 when it began taking on water as the port ama flooded and started breaking apart in 10-15-foot seas with winds of 25-30 knots and gusts up to 53 knots. The vessel sank over a course of four hours, approximately 400 nm east of Cape Hatteras; the closest land was Bermuda, approximately 250 nm away. The USCG was contacted, and **Buddy** hailed **Vamoose** roughly 10 miles upwind, on VHF radio. After it was clear that self-rescue was not possible, the decision to abandon ship was made and a rescue was requested. **Vamoose**, standing by as **Buddy** abandoned ship into their 10-foot inflatable dinghy, motored into position for the dinghy to drift down to them. The entire crew of **Buddy**, along with their gear, was safely boarded. **Vamoose** proceeded to Bermuda to drop off the rescued crew. Selected sources:

The Royal Gazette: ["Trimaran crew tells of dramatic rescue"](#)

US Sailing Hanson Award to crew of Vamoose

Cata Sensation was racing at night in the 2026 Caribbean 600 about 16 nm west of St. John's Harbour in gusty conditions of 30-40 kts when she was struck by a strong gust and capsized in a matter of seconds. She issued a distress call. **Solano**, another race boat, immediately responded and was on scene in 25 minutes. **Solano** rescued **Cata Sensation**'s crew of six from the water, after which **Solano** continued racing. None of the rescued crew had serious injuries, just minor abrasions, and no medical care was required. **Cata Sensation** was last seen capsized, partially submerged, drifting southwesterly, and being monitored by the ABDF Coast Guard. Selected sources:

SAIL-WORLD: "2026 RORC Caribbean 600 - Worthy of its legacy"

Charlotte Jane III was sailing in the 2021 ARC when mechanical linkage on the starboard-side steering of the twin-wheel Hanse 588 failed. Wind gusting to force seven with 4-meter sea led to difficulty steering overnight; the crew deployed a drogue and ARC yacht **Polygala** stood by overnight to assist if needed. The next morning a Mayday was called when the port steering control also failed, causing damage to the emergency steering, leaving the yacht unable to steer. It was agreed to transfer the crew members from **Charlotte Jane III** over to **Magic Dragon**, using the former's life raft. The seamanship skills of the involved crews resulted in a successful rescue, acknowledging

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that getting into a life raft from a vessel which is pitching was difficult and dangerous, a throw line from RV to the life raft was deployed, and tactical plans changed. Selected sources:

SAILWORLD CRUISING: [ARC 2021: “Yacht Charlotte Jane III abandoned after catastrophic steering failure”](#)

Yachting Monthly: ["Offshore sailing skills: All you need to know"](#)

Ciao, a double-handed Sweden Yacht 45, was participating in the 2012 World Cruising Rally between Indonesia and Cocos (Keeling) Islands when she struck an object which damaged the rudder. Several boats were in the vicinity, including *J'Sea* which took her in tow for several hours, *Zoe* which attempted to rendezvous with a high-capacity pump, and *Spirit of Alcides*, which took the couple onboard when it became apparent that *Ciao* would sink due to flooding. Selected sources:

Cruising World: ["Double-Handed Crew Rescued in Indian Ocean"](#)

Denali was racing in the 1988 Newport Bermuda Race when a medical emergency occurred. The rescue unfolded about 250 miles west of Bermuda, after a well-planned response. One of the owner's three sons was suffering extreme abdominal pain, and a marine SSB was used to speak with a physician aboard another vessel. The remote diagnosis pointed to acute appendicitis and prompt hospitalization was recommended. Another competitor aboard a faster 70-footer offered to withdraw from the race and take the crew aboard for a sprint to Bermuda. Skilled boat handling and bagged sails used as fenders expedited an efficient hull-to-hull transfer. The incident highlights the value of effective communications, efficient boat handling and the willingness of fellow sailors to lend assistance. Selected sources:

[A Berth to Bermuda: "Evacuation from S/V Denali" | Cruising Club of America](#)

Elusive, a Swan 44 with a crew of five, was returning to the U.S. after the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race when she encountered severe weather and several serious mechanical, injury, illness, and freshwater problems. The skipper decided to offload two crew and contacted nearby *Yankee Girl*. Since neither vessel wanted to sacrifice its life raft or bring the vessels alongside, the two crew (an 80-year-old woman and a 60-year-old man) jumped overboard and swam to *Yankee Girl*, which had deployed a LifeSling. Neither MOB's life jacket had a crotch strap, which significantly hampered bringing the crew onboard. A shark was noted nearby after the rescue. Both vessels arrived safely in the US. Selected sources:

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2024 BSHR SAFETY INCIDENT LOG

Flow was on a Pacific crossing in 2024 with a crew of two when the Dehler 39 lost its rudder after an earlier impact. The prior 10 days were windy, with challenging upwind 60-degree sailing. They attempted to steer with a Hydrovane and an emergency tiller, but this was ineffective and *Flow* could not be steered. Food was transported to *Flow* by the buddy boat *Oatmeal Savage*, but the crew was exhausted after days of upwind sailing in large seas. Towing was not an option. A decision to abandon was made with calm conditions in daylight, as conditions were forecast to become challenging. Selected sources:

[Flow Rescue from Ventilly family website](#)

SAIL: ["Seaglider Saved!"](#)

Cruising Compass: ["Cruisers Rescue Oceanographic Seaglider in Mid-Pacific Ocean"](#)

Van Tol family interview

Georgia, racing in the 2004 Sydney Hobart, radioed that she was taking on water. She had broken her rudder stock and tore a hole in the boat where the rudder used to be; crew could not stop the inflow and *Georgia* was sinking rapidly. It was dark, a red flare was deployed, and her EPIRB was activated. Nearby vessels responded and were quickly on scene. Clear communication and smooth execution of an agreed-upon plan resulted in a successful rescue. RV *Merit* motored well to the leeward of *Georgia*. Wind and seas blew *Georgia*'s life raft, still tethered to *Georgia*, downwind as *Merit* maneuvered to catch it. Seven of the crew from *Georgia* climbed onto *Merit*. A second rode was tethered from *Merit* to the raft, and *Georgia* pulled the raft back, now with a connecting line. The remaining seven crew climbed into the raft and let out the rode as *Merit* pulled them back. Excellent seamanship enabled *Merit* to hold relative position so the raft could remain tied to two boats at once for the duration of the transfer down and the return trip of the empty raft, in four- to six-foot seas and 25 to 30 knots of wind. Selected sources:

[Rescue of a Sinking Crew done Perfectly | Cruising Club of America](#)

Gunga Din, a Sweden Yachts 41 with seven crew, was racing in the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race when she began taking on water. The crew was unable to determine the source of the flooding until they had cut away a table surrounding the mast; the flooding was coming from under the mast step and was inaccessible. Conditions were moderate but the flooding worsened when they attempted to sail; night was approaching; a rescue

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vessel, *Desna*, was at hand. The crew transferred to *Desna*, which proceeded to Bermuda; *Gunga Din* is presumed to have sunk. Selected sources:

[Incident Report: Reviews of Three Newport-Bermuda Sinkings](#)

Hugo Boss, an Imoca 60, was sailing in the Southern Ocean during the Velux 5 Oceans race in 2006 when the vessel suffered a failure of the canting mechanism on the keel. Her skipper, Alex Thomson, reported up to 50 knots of wind and 8 m seas. The closest competitor, Mike Golding (*Ecover*), sailed upwind for several hours to reach *Hugo Boss*. Thomson used a life raft to transfer to *Ecover*, and it took four attempts to make the transfer. *Ecover* lost her mast 6 hours after the transfer and returned to Cape Town and eventually decided to quit the race. Selected sources:

[SAIL-WORLD: Mike Golding Sails Back to Rescue Alex Thomson](#)

[Yachting World: Great Seamanship: dramatic account by Mike Golding of rescuing Alex Thomson in the Southern Ocean](#)

IdaLina, an Arcona 460, was cruising in 2024 with a crew of two far out in the Pacific under moderate conditions when the rudder stock failed near the upper bearing. The stock then oscillated due to pressure against the rudder and eventually destroyed the lower bearing, causing uncontrollable flooding. The crew took to the life raft. Fortuitously, yacht *Pacific Wind* was nearby, embarked the crew from the life raft, and delivered them safely to land. *IdaLina* sank [see photo on cover page]. Selected sources:

[Yacht: "First the rudder stock breaks, then the Arcona sinks"](#)

Karolina Viking was sailing in the 2024 ARC Rally 300 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands in 4-5 meter seas when it issued a Mayday call due to a severe leak in the starboard engine compartment. The rescue, coordinated with MRCC Cape Verde, designated *Cinderella di Sanremo* as RV, who designated the timing and method of the transfer. *Karolina Viking* was advised to wait for daylight to increase safety. Initial attempts to reach *Karolina Viking* on satphone and VHF were unsuccessful, but a WhatsApp message in the WCC-hosted group from *Karolina Viking* provided their position; the use of Starlink to communicate via WhatsApp was critical to the rescue. *Cinderella di Sanremo* made a reconnaissance approach, to finalize a rescue plan. After abandonment, the catamaran drifted away from the life raft, and the *Karolina Viking* crew was transferred using a heavy-duty floating line secured to their life raft and warped in with a hydraulic winch. Selected sources:

[Yachting World: "A testing time for 140 yachts taking on an Atlantic Crossing"](#)

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Yachting Monthly: ["Man overboard mid Atlantic; separately, one yacht abandoned"](#)

Koomooloo, racing in the 2006 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, was 70 miles offshore taking on water from an unknown source after a night of beating into a confused, fairly short sea with wind strength around 20-28 knots. There was a fairly hard impact and another wave or two later, the water was over the floorboards. The rapid ingress of water necessitated preparations to abandon ship. Mayday was radioed, and nearby yachts responded. *Adventure* arrived at *Koomaloo*'s position 40 minutes later and found her low in the water, with her eight-man crew bailing hard to keep the yacht afloat. A rescue helicopter requested *Adventure* to take the *Koomooloo* crew aboard and the crew of *Koomooloo* abandoned ship into a life raft. The life raft was blown downwind to *Adventure*, and the crew was assisted aboard. Selected sources:

SAIL-WORLD: [The Loss of Koomooloo](#)

Yachting Monthly: ["Race on"](#)

Lady Pepperell, a 54-foot cat ketch with free standing spars, was singlehanded by Tony Lush in the 1982 BOC Race. Besieged by steep 25-to-30-foot seas en route to New Zealand, the vessel was pitchpoled and the resulting keel damage caused an uncontrollable leak and imminent likelihood of keel loss. Lush's Argos satellite distress signal was used to vector fellow competitor Francis Stokes aboard *Mooneshine* to Lush's location, aided by VHF contact. Transfer was made using a boat-to-boat line as a "guide wire" that Lush clipped to and a second line Stokes used to pull him to *Mooneshine*. Tony finished the leg as a passenger. Selected sources:

The New York Times: ["Rescue Deepens Friends' Ties"](#)

Megawat was crossing the Irish Sea from Dublin to Scotland in 20 to 30 knots of wind and 1½- to 2-meter seas in May 2005 when it sank following breakage of the rudderstock. A loud bang was heard, the steering failed and the craft began to take on water. *Megawat* sank in approximately 40 minutes. A pan-pan call was placed. The life raft of *Megawat* failed to inflate and the three crew of *Megawat* were successfully transferred using an inflatable tender belonging to RV *Quite Correct*. Selected sources:

[MCIB Report](#) of The Investigation into The Sinking of the Yacht *Megawat* 25 May 2005

Mini 829, a Pogo 6.5-meter sloop, was participating in the 2025 singlehanded race from Newport, Rhode Island, to Bermuda. About midway, she lost her rig; the skipper issued

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Mayday and contacted the race headquarters. Race headquarters saw on the Yellow Brick that *Strummer* was 30 NM from *Mini 829* and, via a Garmin InReach satellite messenger, contacted her 82-year-old skipper, who immediately altered course to rendezvous. Being 300 NM from any possible salvage, the skipper of *Mini 829* decided to abandon his vessel and transfer to *Strummer*. When the vessels were close by, the skipper inflated his life raft (initially upside down) and attempted to embark aboard *Strummer*. At first attempt, the opening to the raft was opposite *Strummer*; the skippers were unable to connect the life raft to *Strummer*; the raft drifted along *Strummer's* side and around her stern, where it disabled *Strummer's* self-steering. After several more attempts, a throw rope connected the life raft to *Strummer*, but the skipper, in full foul weather gear, life jacket and harness full of water was unable to climb aboard from the raft. *Strummer's* skipper used her main halyard and electric winch to hoist the skipper aboard. Both exhausted skippers then slept for 12 hours before proceeding to Bermuda. Selected sources:

2026 *Voyages Magazine*; Cruising Club of America: [Letters to Voyages](#)

Monterey, a Farr 56 with a very experienced crew of six, was participating in the inaugural 2017 Antigua Bermuda Race (which her skipper/owner had founded) in moderate conditions. During the night, following a loud bang, the skipper observed flooding in the forward section of the vessel. The crew searched in vain for the source of the flooding. The VHF was malfunctioning; flares were ignited. *Esprit de Corps IV*, a few miles away, saw the flares and came nearby. *Monterey's* crew disembarked into the life raft, transferred to *Esprit de Corps IV* without incident, and was taken to Bermuda; *Monterey* sank.

2018 *Voyages Magazine*; Cruising Club of America: ["A Sad Tale"](#)

Movistar, a Volvo Open 70, was racing in the 2005-2006 Volvo Ocean Race 300 NM from England, when her keel pivot began breaking free from the hull, causing flooding. After broadcasting a pan-pan, nearby competitor *ABN AMRO TWO* diverted to her location and rescued the crew of 10 as the rate of water ingress was more than the emergency pumps could handle. Two trips in a life raft were used to transport all of the gear, food, and crew members between vessels. The timing of the transfer was largely based on the forecast of winds to 50 knots in the next 24 hours. Selected sources:

Yachting World: ["Movistar's story"](#)

Email from Stan Honey

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OEX, a Santa Cruz 70, was participating in the 2017 Transpacific Yacht Race when the upper rudder bearing broke free from the underside of the deck, about 360 miles off the California coast. The crew broadcast a Mayday on VHF radio, which was received by *Pyewacket*, an Andrews 68 located approximately 5 nm away. When only a foot of freeboard remained, the owner of *OEX* decided to abandon ship and transfer the crew to *Pyewacket* in life rafts. *Pyewacket* then withdrew from the race and returned to Southern California with the combined crew of roughly 18 men. Selected sources:

Transpac Race: [John Sangmeister and Roy Disney give account of OEX Rescue](#)

Telephone conversations with Roy Disney and John Sangmeister.

PRB, an IMOCA 60 modified for foiling, was power reaching in near gale force conditions in the Southern Ocean (840 miles from Cape Town, South Africa). The hull sheared just forward of the mast causing catastrophic flooding. Singlehander Kevin Escoffier was competing in the 2020 Vendée Globe Race and immediately contacted race headquarters via satellite and activated his EPIRB. Donning a survival suit, he launched his life raft and boarded as the vessel sunk. Jean Le Cam aboard *Yes We Can* spent the next day en route and searching for Escoffier. In heavy seas, they executed an over-the-transom transfer and continued with Escoffier as a passenger. Selected sources:

The Guardian: ["Just Terrifying: Vendée Globe Rescue"](#)

Yachting Monthly: ["Vendée Globe rescue: Kevin Escoffier on his sinking and recovery"](#)

PRB (FRA 85), an early IMOCA 60, was skippered by Isabelle Autissier in the 1998-99 Around Alone Race. Conditions were severe in the Southern Ocean: 25-35 knots of wind with seas 20- to 25-feet. A steering system failure resulted in a knockdown, dismasting and inversion of the hull. Autissier closed the forward watertight bulkhead door and transom hatch. Initial distress signals were assumed to be a unit malfunction. A backup satellite phone linked her to race headquarters who alerted nearby competitors via COMSAT email. Giovanni Soldini aboard *Fila*, nearly 200 miles astern of *PRB*, used radar on the final approach and a hammer flung against the hull to gain attention. Transfer was made via life raft and Autissier sailed on as a passenger. Selected sources:

[US Sailing Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal Giovanni Soldini](#)

Raindancer was on a 2023 South Pacific crossing midway between the *Galápagos* and the Marquesas with four people on board when it encountered a whale. The Peterson

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44 sank in 15 minutes as skipper and crew rapidly abandoned ship into a life raft and inflatable dinghy tied together. Before abandoning ship, the crew activated an EPIRB and sent out a Mayday on VHF, and in the life raft they activated a GlobalStar SPOT tracker, started regular Mayday signals via handheld VHF, and turned on an IridiumGO! and cell phone (creating a satellite service Wi-Fi hot spot) to message. The EPIRB signal set off an official SAR chain of command that began in Peru and was rerouted through the Joint Rescue Coordination Center Alameda in California, where the U.S. Coast Guard fielded phone calls and coordinated via AMVER to divert a commercial ship to the life raft. Text messages set off another effort involving multiple organizations and cruisers' nets. One net discovered the catamaran *Rolling Stones* only about 35 NM away, and vectored them to *Raindancer's* life raft. *Rolling Stones* and the AMVER vessel both arrived near the raft about nine hours after the sinking. *Raindancer* chose to evacuate to the catamaran rather than to a merchant vessel. Selected sources:

Yachting World: [Sunk by a Whale in the Middle of the Pacific](#) Ocean

Boatwatch.org: Four Sailors Rescued from Life raft after [S/V Raindancer Hit by Whale in South Pacific](#)

Restive, a 48-foot wooden sloop, was in the Gulf Stream in 2015, returning from the Marion Bermuda Race in 25 knots and 10-foot seas. About 142 NM from land, she suddenly lost steering. The upper bearing to the rudder post had detached and was moving wildly, flexing the lower bearing, and threatening a major hull breach. *Restive* issued a VHF Mayday and also contacted the U.S. Coast Guard. Another returning race boat, *Sparky*, 8 nm away, responded to the Mayday and reversed course to assist. She was on scene two hours later. After unsuccessfully trying to restore steerage, and with Coast Guard assistance hours away and the weather worsening, her crew abandoned *Restive* to their life raft and were picked up by *Sparky*. *Restive* was later recovered by a salvage company. Selected sources:

Jamesgblaine.com: *Perspectives*: [Rescue at Sea](#)

Tyger of London was a skippered charter yacht bound for Marina San Miguel, Tenerife, Canary Islands, in December 2017, with four paying passengers as crew on board. At about 1700, the crew heard a loud bang and *Tyger of London* immediately heeled to starboard, capsized and inverted. The crew released their lifelines, fell from the cockpit into the water and lifejackets automatically inflated. The skipper of another yacht, *St Barbara V*, 200 nautical miles to the west, raised the alarm and rescued the crew from the water. All rescued crew required assistance boarding *St Barbara V*; there were no serious injuries. Investigation found that failure of the keel structure caused the loss of the keel and led to the capsize. Technical inspection of the keel plate, recovered

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with the hull, revealed that the keel had not been manufactured in accordance with the designer's drawings. Selected sources:

[MAIB Accident Report of the keel failure and capsizing of Tyger of London](#)

VM Matériaux was an IMOCA 60 yacht participating in the 2008-2009 Vendée Globe, a solo, non-stop round the world race. On January 6, 2009, day 58 of the race, skipper Jean Le Cam contacted his shore team that he was experiencing serious difficulties and was in distress. A short time later Le Cam activated his EPIRB as the boat had capsized, having lost its keel bulb. She was approximately 200 NM west of Tierra del Fuego, Cape Horn. Fellow competitor Vincent Riou, in *PRB 3*, diverted and was able to locate *VM Matériaux* and Le Cam, who had exited a security hatch and was hanging onto the rudder of the overturned boat. Riou circled the capsized boat three times before going in closer and successfully tossing a line to Le Cam. Le Cam, wearing a survival suit, was winched to *PRB 3* by Riou and was able to scramble aboard. During the rescue, the port outrigger of *PRB 3* struck *VM Matériaux*'s upturned keel, damaging the mast of *PRB 3*, which subsequently had to retire. Upon redress, Riou was awarded third place as he was in third place at the time he diverted to rescue Le Cam. Selected sources:

Yachting World: [Vendée Globe: VM Matériaux capsizes](#)

Wikipedia: [2008-2009 Vendée Globe](#)

APPENDIX I: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIS	Automatic Identification System
AMVER	Automated Mutual-Assistance Vessel Rescue
BRF	Bermuda Race Foundation
BROC	The Bermuda Race Organizing Committee
CCA	The Cruising Club of America
DSC	Digital Selective Calling
EPIRB	Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon
GPS	Global Positioning System
PIC	Person in Charge
PLB	Personal Locator Beacon
RCC	Rescue Coordination Center
RV	Rescue vessel
SAR	Search and Rescue
SAS	Safety-at-Sea
S/V	Sailing vessel
VHF	Very High Frequency (radio)
VID	Vessel in distress
YTYCR	Yacht-to-Yacht Crew Rescue

CONVENTIONS

This report uses the term skipper to designate the person in charge (PIC) of the yacht. The PIC may also be called the person-in-command, captain, or ship's master. In this report, these terms are interchangeable.

Yacht names are in italics without the preceding descriptive S/V.

APPENDIX II: REVIEW TEAM MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

Ernie Godshalk is a CCA member and fleet captain, past chair of The CCA Safety and Seamanship Committee, past member of US Sailing SAS Committee, and past member of New York Yacht Club Seamanship Committee. He has raced and cruised for 60 years in the U.S., Canada, Bermuda, the Caribbean, transatlantic, Europe, and Asia, in recent decades aboard his 42-foot sailboat.

Alistair Hackett is managing director of Ocean Safety Ltd. in Southampton, United Kingdom, and a member of the RORC Special Regulations Committee. During his tenure at Ocean Safety, Alistair has overseen safety training for the last four Volvo Ocean Races.

Chuck Hawley is a CCA member, Safety-at-Sea expert, US Sailing SAS course moderator since 1990, and former chair of US Sailing's Safety at Sea Committee. He has served on the National Boating Safety Advisory Council as well as the American Boat and Yacht Council Technical Committee. He was awarded the Nathanael F. Herreshoff Award from US Sailing in 2020 and was inducted into the National Sailing Hall of Fame in 2025.

Bob Kostyla is a member of the Beverly Yacht Club, the Marion Bermuda Race (MBR) Committee, and an MBR presenter. He has eleven MBRs and two Newport Bermuda Races on his sailing resume. He was helmsman, under adverse conditions, of *Sparky* during the YTYCR of the crew of *Restive* after the 2015 MBR.

Ralph Naranjo is a CCA member, US Sailing SAS course moderator, former chair of US Sailing's Safety and Seamanship Committee, former Vanderstar Chair, US Naval Academy, and an author of bluewater sailing books including *The Art of Seamanship*⁷. He is a contributing editor to nautical magazines and has served as a judge of the annual Boat of the Year competition for *Cruising World* magazine.

Kirsten Neuschäfer authored the foreword to the YTYCR report. Specializing in high-latitude and high-adventure sailing, she won the 2022 Golden Globe Race (GGR), becoming the first woman to win the race since it began in 1968 and the first woman and first South African to win any round-the-world race by the three great capes. During the 2022 GGR, she rescued fellow entrant Tapio Lehtinen and was awarded the Rod Stephens Seamanship Trophy by The Cruising Club of America and Ocean Cruising Club's Seamanship Award.

Melanie Peasey is chief safety and sea survival instructor for Australian Sailing. With a background in keelboat sailing, Peasey has competed in most of the yacht races on the east coast of Australia. Her career has spanned many years in the marine industry, and

⁷ Ralph Naranjo, *The Art of Seamanship: Evolving Skills, Exploring Oceans, and Handling Wind, Waves, and Weather* (McGraw Hill/ International Marine, 2014)

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as principal at a maritime college, she became passionate about increasing culture and education for staying safe aboard vessels.

William Strassberg, MD, is a CCA member and Chair of the CCA Safety and Seamanship Committee. Strassberg has sailed over 50,000 bluewater miles, crossing the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and sailing at high latitudes, including Greenland, the Arctic Circle, New Zealand, and Cape Stewart to the south. His published writing for The CCA includes [*Skippers, Leadership, and Vessel Safety*](#). He is also the editor of the *CCA Essential Passage Guide to the Viking Route*.

John Winder is a CCA member, retired marine surveyor, two-time chair of the Newport Bermuda Race, member of the BROCC, representative of the BRF, member of Storm Trysail Club and the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club. He has completed 25 Newport Bermuda Races from 1970 through 2026.

Richard York is a CCA member, chair of the US Sailing Safety at Sea Committee, and member of the Seamanship and Safety Committees of The CCA and the Storm Trysail Club. He owns the J/46 *Aragorn*, with almost 75,000 sea miles under his command. He's completed a west-about circumnavigation, 2003-07 and five Bermuda races from 1974 through 1982.

APPENDIX III: ABOUT THE CCA SAFETY & SEAMANSHIP COMMITTEE

The mission of The CCA Safety and Seamanship Committee is *to make yachting safer by researching and promoting best safety practices and seamanship skills, capitalizing on the knowledge and bluewater experience of CCA members to provide educational resources to the yachting community of racers and cruisers of offshore capable vessels and to yachtsmen and women with interest in offshore passage-making*.

The committee's vision is to instill a culture of safety and best safety practices within the yachting community. The Safety and Seamanship Committee collaborates actively with like-minded clubs, associations, and organizing bodies to coordinate efforts, promote, and disseminate safety and seamanship training to the yachting community. The focus is on the practical application of safety and seamanship skills and enhancement of the safety ethos aboard our boats through skills training and leadership education.

APPENDIX IV: ORGANIZATIONS CONTACTED

Yacht Races:

- Newport Bermuda Race
- Marion Bermuda Race
- Annapolis-Bermuda Race
- Antigua-Bermuda Race
- Fastnet Race
- Sydney Hobart Race
- Cape Town-Rio Race
- Marblehead-Halifax Race
- Transpacific Yacht Race
- Pacific Cup
- Vendee Globe
- Mini Transat Race
- San Diego-Puerto Vallarta Race

Governing bodies and associations:

- World Sailing
- US Sailing
- Australian Sailing
- Royal Yachting Association
- Royal Ocean Racing Club
- Royal Western Yacht Club
- Cruising Yacht Club of Australia

Rallies:

- ARC
- Salty Dawg
- Caribbean 1500
- Pacific Puddle Jump

Periodicals:

- Cruising World*
- Yachting World*
- SAIL*
- Cruising Compass*