

MAIB

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH

FLYER TO THE LEISURE INDUSTRY

Foundering of a motor cruiser with the loss of three lives



Vessel as control was lost



Rescue operation

A second-hand Bayliner 245SB motor cruiser, privately purchased through an American brokerage, was imported into the United Kingdom and delivered to Whitby on 12 November 2007. The new owner's prior sailing experience had been 12 years earlier, when he had owned a smaller motor cruiser for about 2 years.

On the morning of 17 November, the skipper, his partner, brother and a friend launched the boat from the local slipway. Weather conditions on the day were good, and they spent some time motoring around the bay. However, when they returned, the wind was too strong for the skipper to manoeuvre the boat onto the trailer, so the boat was berthed in the nearby marina.

On 23 November, the skipper, his partner and brother arrived at the marina with the intention of taking the boat to sea for a second, and final trip before hauling it out for the winter. Weather conditions that morning were poor. The forecast, which was displayed at the marina office, predicted northerly winds of Beaufort force 7 or gale 8, sea conditions rough or very rough at first. In the exposed harbour entrance, the northerly wind had created 4 to 5m breaking seas, and a spring flood tide was also sweeping across the entrance.

The boat departed the marina with the cockpit cover rigged, but with the rear panel rolled up to provide an opening at the stern. Two of the three crew were wearing American manufactured buoyancy aids. The only navigation aid on board was a steering compass, and there were no nautical publications or charts for passage planning. The American built VHF set was turned off, because the skipper believed that the working channels were incompatible with those used in the UK.

As the boat made its way toward the harbour entrance, the engineer at the local lifeboat station attempted to call the skipper on the VHF to warn him of the dangerous sea conditions, but there was no response. The boat continued to the harbour entrance with all three crew standing at the forward end of the cockpit.

At the harbour entrance, the boat encountered a succession of steep waves, estimated at 4 to 5m in height. As the boat rose to the first wave, one crew member fell aft. The boat continued out and met a second breaking wave of similar height. As the boat passed over this crest, the skipper and his brother fell through the open canopy at the stern and into the sea. The boat lost power, and drifted along the seaward side of the harbour until a large breaking wave caused it to capsize, throwing the skipper's partner into the sea. Despite rapid rescue attempts, the crew all perished in the accident. The boat was driven ashore and broke up in the surf.

Safety Issues:

- The crew did not have the training or experience to identify and assess the dangers they faced and the risks of sailing in such extreme conditions. Completion of recognised courses by leisure boaters can significantly improve their safety awareness and assist them to identify potential risks.
- Without reference to the appropriate nautical charts and publications, the crew could not construct a suitable passage plan. Had they done so, the planning process might well have alerted them to the dangers of leaving harbour into a northerly gale, and they would not have attempted it. The 'SOLAS V for Pleasure Craft' leaflet, published by the MCA, provides guidance to leisure users on the techniques involved in passage planning.
- The effect of northerly gales on the sea conditions in the harbour entrance was well known. Many harbour authorities provide guidance to leisure craft users on their local navigational hazards, or are willing to give such advice on request, knowing that local knowledge can significantly enhance the safe navigation of leisure craft. Had the skipper sought local knowledge from the harbourmaster, marina manager or others before the trip, he would have been warned of the hazards.
- The American buoyancy aids worn by two of the crew, were not EU approved, provided only 70N of buoyancy, and were being worn in conditions well outside their designed criteria. An EU approved Level 150 lifejacket would have been appropriate in the conditions faced by the crew on the day of the accident. Importantly, such a lifejacket, properly fitted, would have kept their heads above water, even if they fell unconscious, and would have significantly improved their chances of survival.

Further details on the accident and the subsequent investigation can be found in the MAIB's investigation report, which is posted on its website:

www.maib.gov.uk

Alternatively, a copy of the report will be sent on request, free of charge.

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