

SYNOPSIS

The yacht *Ouzo* sailed from Bembridge, Isle of Wight (IOW), bound for Dartmouth, Devon on the evening of 20 August 2006. She had her three regular crew members on board who were intending to take part in the Dartmouth Royal Regatta.

The body of one of the crew members was found in the sea just before midday on 22 August about 10 miles south of the Nab Tower. At about 1900 on the following day, the bodies of the other two crew were recovered from the sea. They had all been wearing inflated lifejackets and good quality yachting clothing. Despite extensive surface and sub-surface searches no trace of the yacht has been found.

The last record of the yacht was at 2230 on 20 August when she went out of range of the Southampton/Portsmouth VTS radar system in Sandown Bay. At this time it is believed that the yacht was sailing close hauled in a south-south-westerly direction.

Voyage data recorder (VDR) records from ships that had been in the area during the night of 20/21 August were recovered and analysed by MAIB inspectors in order to use the radar information to trace the movements of the yacht. In the course of this analysis, it became apparent that the ro-ro passenger ferry *Pride of Bilbao* had had an encounter with a small yacht about 6 miles south of St Catherine's Point, IOW, in the early hours of the morning of 21 August.

The lookout on the ferry had not seen the yacht until it was very close ahead, and she had not shown up on the ferry's radars. The officer of the watch tried a last minute manoeuvre to avoid her and believed that he had been successful. The sighting of a single red and then, possibly, a white light astern of the ferry after the incident was considered sufficient by the watchkeeping officer to assume that the yacht was safe, and the ferry continued to Bilbao without taking further action.

After careful analysis of the facts, the MAIB is of the firm opinion that the yacht was *Ouzo* and that *Pride of Bilbao* had collided with her, or passed so close that she had been swamped or capsized by the vessel's wash.

The investigation has considered a number of issues, including:

- o Why the lookout did not see the yacht earlier;
- o Why the yacht did not show on the ferry's radars;
- o Why the yacht's crew did not survive the accident;
- o Why the ferry did not stop and assist the yacht.

Recommendations have been aimed at preventing glasses with photochromic lenses being used by bridge lookouts; improving the handover procedures between watchkeepers; and improving bridge night time blackout procedures. Further recommendations are aimed at improving the effectiveness of yachts' radar reflectors, navigation lights and lifesaving equipment.