

SYNOPSIS



At approximately 1429 on 20 May 2006, the IMX 38 yacht, *Roaring Meg of Cowes*, owned by Sail (UK) Ltd of Poole, was crossing Southampton Water towards the River Hamble. The wind force was 6-7 gusting 8 from the west-south-west. The yacht made two accidental gybes. The first resulted in one of the yacht's crew sustaining multiple fractures to one of his legs, and the second caused a second member of the crew to suffer a severe head injury.

Nine people from a social and adventure activities group booked, what was advertised as, a "sailing taster" with Sail (UK) Ltd for 20 May 2006. During the previous afternoon, *Roaring Meg of Cowes* was put into the water, following 8 months on a hard standing. The skipper, who had been nominated by Sail (UK) Ltd to supervise the group, arrived during the afternoon to prepare the yacht. Feeling unwell, he contacted the director of Sail (UK) Ltd during the afternoon, and again at 0800 on 20 May. By this time, it had become evident that the nominated skipper was not well enough to supervise the group that day, so the director immediately drove from Poole to Hamble to assume the role of replacement skipper.

The group began to arrive at 0845. They were surprised that there was no one to meet them, but they eventually found *Roaring Meg of Cowes* berthed outboard of three other yachts. By about 0920 the replacement skipper arrived with the last of only eight members of the group to board the yacht. The replacement skipper decided that the unwell skipper could stay on board, in his bunk, during the trip. He also discovered that one of the group held an RYA Day Skipper's qualification and had regularly sailed.

Because of the weather forecast, and the inexperience of the group, the replacement skipper decided that the group would be restricted to sailing in Southampton Water.

A very limited safety brief was then given to the eight members of the group. They were reminded to keep their lifelines clipped on and to keep well clear of the boom. No roll-call was taken and there was no explanation given why the ninth member of the group had failed to turn up.

The yacht was ill prepared, the domestic arrangements were poor, ropes were tangled and some were covered in algae. The yacht was generally dirty, both on deck and between decks and it appeared to have suffered neglect. The group were very disappointed with the organisation and, at that point, some of them considered leaving the vessel.

After taking on fresh water and fuel, *Roaring Meg of Cowes* finally motored away from her berth at 1130. The group, now much happier, enjoyed the voyage up Southampton Water. They settled into the business of sailing and completed a number of tacks. The lady who was to suffer the head injury, operated the traveller gear competently and was acutely aware of the need to keep low, under the boom.

After a light lunch, the yacht turned and headed back down Southampton Water. The qualified day skipper of the group was now on the helm with his harness clipped to the back stay. The weather began to worsen, the wind had picked up and there were white horses on the wave tops. By that time, some of the group were becoming unsettled.

The replacement skipper then appeared to make a quick decision to return to the marina. Some heard the decision, others did not. The skipper began to tack back up Southampton Water as he asked the day skipper to start the engine. The day skipper unclipped his harness and checked that the engine control lever was in neutral. He found it to be seized, but having released it, he went in front of the wheel, to go down below to start the engine. He came to an abrupt stop because his safety line became taut, his line not having been released as first thought. The skipper, now distracted, turned round to release the safety line and, a few seconds later, the yacht conducted an accidental gybe. The boom moved rapidly from starboard to port, trapping the day skipper's right leg with the mainsheet, causing multiple fractures to his leg. The boom immediately returned to the starboard side.

The day skipper clambered to the forward part of the cockpit. At the same time, another of the group, with the help of the unwell skipper, managed to start the engine. At about 1432, the replacement skipper mentioned the need to lower the mainsail, but he did not direct his instruction to anyone in particular. The lady operating the traveller stood up, possibly to help with the sail, or as a result of the boat's sudden heel to port, and at the same time the yacht conducted another accidental gybe. The boom moved rapidly from starboard to port, hitting the lady on the right side of her head, causing her severe injuries.

It was a further 5 minutes before the sail was fully lowered and the yacht brought under control. At 1437, a VHF "Pan Pan" call was transmitted to Solent CG. The CG arranged for the emergency services to attend the yacht on berthing at nearby Warsash, from where the casualties were transferred to hospital.

Both accidents were caused by the replacement skipper's failure to properly anticipate the likely effects of the prevailing wind conditions relative to the course the yacht was being steered. Events leading to the first accident were compounded by the day skipper's lifeline becoming snagged around the wheel as well as the distraction caused by the need to unclip the lifeline. Concern felt by the replacement skipper following the first accident undoubtedly contributed to the second event.

A number of safety issues relating to Sail (UK) Ltd were identified. These include:

- Boat handling and decision-making processes by the skipper.
- The poor condition of the vessel, its preparedness and lack of equipment.
- The poor standard of the safety briefing.
- Manning levels that were not in accordance with the relevant regulations.
- Unclear Safety Policy and lack of comprehensive risk assessments.
- Delay in alerting the emergency services to the injuries.

The MAIB has made recommendations to Sail (UK) Ltd to review:

- The company's Safety Policy, risk assessments and associated documentation.
- Procedures, to ensure yachts are properly prepared for use.
- The need for passage planning well in advance of the intended voyage.
- Safety briefings' procedures, and ensure that injuries are promptly reported.
- Procedures, to ensure that vessels are manned in accordance with the relevant regulations.

The RYA has been recommended to:

- Promulgate to its members, the safety issues identified in the investigation report.