

## SYNOPSIS



On 17 March 2006, a 9 metre leisure yacht was being delivered from Hamble to Plymouth. On board were the owner and a delivery skipper. At about 2330, the delivery skipper went overboard. Due to electrical power problems on board, the GPS was not functioning, and although the alarm was raised by VHF radio, the owner was unable to give his position, and the VHF radio soon stopped operating. A search and rescue operation involving three RNLI lifeboats, five merchant ships and a coastguard helicopter, eventually located both the skipper's body and the yacht.

The owner had purchased the yacht a little over 1 month before the accident, and it had been kept ashore awaiting delivery by sea. The yacht was launched in the morning that she sailed, with the owner and delivery skipper meeting for the first time that same morning. After familiarising themselves with the yacht, fuelling and storing was completed by mid-afternoon, and they set off.

The weather forecast was for east or north easterly winds of force 5-7. With this in mind, the smaller, self tacking jib was set, with the mainsail uncovered but not hoisted. The engine was kept running and the yacht motor-sailed down the West Solent, making 9 knots. On passing the Needles, the skipper declared it was time they clipped on, and ensured that the owner was wearing his safety line, and that it was attached to a strong point. He failed to put on his own safety line.

At about 1900, shortly after clearing the Needles Channel, the engine overheat alarm sounded, and the engine was stopped. The voyage continued under sail, but about 2 hours later all electrical power was lost. The skipper went below to investigate, and managed to restore the electrical supply by overriding the low voltage trip on the distribution panel. This kept power to the lights and instruments for a further hour, but the services progressively failed as the battery power reduced, eventually leaving them with just the light on the compass and the dial of the VHF radio.

As both men were feeling seasick, they had decided to doze in the cockpit, rather than sleep below. The owner made himself comfortable in the port aft corner of the cockpit. The skipper was helming and was sitting on the port side ahead of the owner.

It would appear that the delivery skipper fell, or was washed overboard in heavy weather. The owner was awoken by a shout, and was hit on the head as the skipper fell overboard. The skipper was still not wearing his lifeline. The owner, who could see the light on the skipper's lifejacket astern, threw the rescue horseshoe and tried to turn the yacht to get to him. But the direction of the wind and sea state rendered this impossible. He therefore tried to start the engine, but there was insufficient battery power. Recognising that he needed assistance, the owner then attempted to send out a "Mayday" call by VHF radio. There was enough battery power to run the VHF set, but the GPS receiver had switched off due to low power, so he could not give his position. The coastguard was able to triangulate the yacht's transmission, and started a search and rescue operation, which, 3 hours later, discovered the skipper's body and the yacht. The owner was taken ashore by an RNLI lifeboat, suffering from shock and exhaustion, and the yacht was abandoned 16 miles offshore.

The yacht was recovered, undamaged, the following day and towed to Dartmouth.

Notwithstanding the tragic consequences of this accident, the MAIB has concluded that the safety issues identified during its investigation do not warrant specific safety recommendations on this occasion. However, an article about this accident, and the safety issues it highlighted, has been prepared and distributed to the leisure industry through the yachting press. The article has also been sent to the YBDSA, RYA and RNLI who are to promulgate it to their membership.

Figure 1



*Yacht Pastime*