

SYNOPSIS



At about 1207 (UTC +1) on 28 June 2002, the Class VI passenger vessel *Pride of the Dart*, while on passage between Torquay and Dartmouth, grounded briefly, close to Mew Stone rocks, which are near the mouth of the River Dart. The vessel was badly damaged and began to flood; there was no pollution and none of the passengers was injured, although a number of them suffered shock. Brixham Coastguard informed the MAIB of the accident at 1518 that day.

Pride of the Dart left Torquay harbour at 1108 with 27 passengers, the skipper and a crewman on board for a coastal passage to Dartmouth, intending to return later in the afternoon. The vessel approached Mew Stone rocks, a number of small islands and reefs lying about 1½ cables south of the mainland. The skipper had intended to pass between the rocks and the mainland, so that the passengers could observe seals basking on the rocks. However, he then realised the tide was too high to expose the rocks on which the seals basked, and he decided to change course and pass to the south of the rocks. On placing the wheel to port, he heard noises coming from the steering mechanism. He therefore reverted to his original plan, which was to pass between the rocks and the mainland. He altered course to starboard. Shortly afterwards, the vessel grounded briefly on the reef. The grounding was felt and heard by all on board.

The skipper sent a distress message on VHF radio channel 16. The crewman found that the vessel was taking on water, and, on informing the skipper, they decided to issue lifejackets to the passengers. *Pride of the Dart* was able to proceed towards the River Dart, where two local passenger vessels went alongside, embarked her passengers, and took them ashore.

For her safety, the vessel was beached near Kingswear, where temporary repairs were made. She was then taken to a local shipyard.

The MAIB has since recommended Trinity House to review the area of Mew Stone rocks and implement such navigational aids to ensure the safe navigation of craft which ply these waters. This review has now been completed. Its conclusions are set out in Section 4. Additionally, a Chief Inspector's letter has been sent to the vessel's owner/skipper recommending them to:

- Ensure a voyage plan, including contingency plans, is formulated for each passage;
- Conduct routine emergency drills; and
- Routinely inspect and maintain the steering gear system.