

SYNOPSIS



On 5 May 2001, four XOD yachts collided with the chain ferry, *Bramble Bush Bay*, which plies between Sandbanks and South Haven Point at the entrance to Poole Harbour. One yacht, *X17*, and her owner's wife were drawn under the ferry. Two RNLI lifeboats rescued two of the yacht's three crew members. The third member was able to climb on to the chain ferry. They were unharmed, but the yacht was a total loss.

A fleet of XODs belonging to Parkstone Yacht Club began racing at 1405 from a start line inside Poole Harbour. Shortly after the race began the fleet encountered the inward bound fast ferry *Condor Vitesse*, which was late arriving. The yachts moved out of the channel to the north to avoid the ferry.

After *Condor Vitesse* had passed, the chain ferry's skipper saw a gap between the leading three XODs and the rest of the fleet, so he manoeuvred the vessel away from the Sandbanks slipway. However, as they approached the chain ferry, the yachts lost the wind and their steerage. Because they were close to the Sandbanks side, a lee had been created from the north-easterly wind. Under an obligation to keep out of the way of all traffic, the skipper reversed the chain ferry to allow the leading group to pass to the south. However, the next four XODs could not avoid the ferry and landed alongside in the strong ebb tide.

Two RNLI lifeboats, which had been close by when the incident occurred, quickly towed three of the XODs away from the chain ferry. A line from a launch was passed to the last yacht, *X17*, and as she was being towed she heeled to starboard and was in danger of capsizing. The line was released and *X17* landed heavily back alongside. With water on board, the pressure of the strong ebb tide and the turbulence, the boat was drawn underneath the chain ferry, together with the owner's wife. The owner and his other crew member hung on to the grab lines hanging down from the sponson on the side of the chain ferry. The owner's wife emerged on the other side and was quickly rescued by one of the RNLI lifeboats; the owner was retrieved with difficulty by the other lifeboat, and the remaining crew member managed to climb on board the chain ferry.

X17's crew members were taken to hospital for medical checks, but they were found to be uninjured.

A safety recommendation has been made to the Poole Harbour Commissioners (PHC) to enhance co-ordination of communications between the PHC's port control, the chain ferry, yacht club race officers and rescue boats before and during racing events.

A further recommendation has been addressed to Parkstone Yacht Club, to review, and if necessary improve, the effectiveness of the rescue boats and their towing capabilities.