



SAFETY FLYER TO PLEASURE CRAFT USERS

Loss of control of the powerboat *Awesome* near Little Thatch Island, British Virgin Islands on 2 October 2022, resulting in two fatalities

Image courtesy of *Awesome's* owner



Awesome

Narrative

In the early evening of 2 October 2022, the mono-hulled offshore powerboat *Awesome* was returning to East End dock from Jost Van Dyke, British Virgin Islands (BVI) with a second boat close behind. As *Awesome* passed between Frenchman's Cay and Little Thatch Island it suddenly veered to starboard (right), then rolled violently to port (left), which immediately ejected ten of the eleven occupants. *Awesome* reared up in the air bow first and landed back in the water on its transom, immediately partially sinking. The air trapped in the forward cabin held the boat briefly afloat vertically, before it slowly sank over the next 5 to 10 minutes.

The boat that was in convoy with *Awesome*, a passing fishing vessel and a local charter boat were quickly on scene and ten of the eleven people in the water were rapidly located and transferred ashore to West End ferry terminal. Five-year-old Brianna Graham was rushed to hospital, where she was declared deceased shortly afterwards. Despite an extensive coordinated search, 32-year-old Kristal Black was not found at that time of the accident. Her body was located in the forward cabin of *Awesome's* wreck during a seabed search.

The investigation found that *Awesome* suddenly altered course due to a loss of steering control. A universal joint on the port drive shaft failed while the boat was travelling at around 60 miles per hour and the flailing drive shaft severed a steering system hydraulic hose, resulting in a complete loss of pressure. The coupling failure was due to excessive wear caused by lack of lubrication over a prolonged period of time that probably extended to the boat's previous ownership.

Awesome's occupants included young children; no one was wearing a lifejacket or personal flotation device (PFD), and many of the group could not swim well. It is very fortunate that other craft quickly arrived on scene to rescue them from the water. *Awesome* was equipped with PFDs, which were found in the forward cabin during a post-accident inspection of the wreck. *Awesome's* engines were fitted with kill switches, designed to stop the boat's engines when activated by a kill cord, which were found to be still in place and tied back.

Safety lessons

1. Maintenance is important, especially tasks involving the upkeep of less visible drivetrain elements such as greasing drive shaft universal joints; making sure control cables are in good order and not corroded internally; and checking water pumps on outboard motors. Consult the maintenance schedule for each component to preserve functionality and reduce its risk of failure.
2. Lifejackets and PFDs are useless unless worn. Correctly fitted PFDs are proven to save lives, and an inflated lifejacket will keep a person afloat with their face up and their head above water even if they are unconscious.
3. Safety devices are designed to prevent serious injury and save lives. Many boats are fitted with a kill cord, which should be clipped to the driver and will activate a kill switch that stops the engine if they are thrown overboard or away from the driving position.
4. Training raises awareness. There are thousands of boaters in the British Virgin Islands, and many more that visit to annually to enjoy the islands from the water. The training available and provided locally in the BVI will equip captains with the local knowledge required to safely operate their boats and build the confidence and experience of those already familiar with BVI waters.

This flyer and the MAIB's investigation report are posted on our website: www.gov.uk/maib

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This investigation was carried out by the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) on behalf of the British Virgin Islands Government in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the MAIB and the Red Ensign Group Category 1 registry of the British Virgin Islands.

Extract from the Virgin Islands Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2020 – Regulation 13:

“The sole objective of a marine safety investigation is the prevention of future accidents through the ascertainment of its causes and circumstances. It is not the purpose of a marine safety investigation to determine liability nor, except so far as is necessary to achieve its objective, to apportion blame.”

NOTE

This report is not written with litigation in mind and, pursuant to Regulation 24 of the Virgin Islands Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2020, records obtained through the investigator's powers are inadmissible in any judicial proceedings whose purpose or one of whose purposes is to attribute or apportion liability or blame.

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