



Boat's Ready ! Is It Safe As Can Be?



By Vincent Pica
*Division 18 (ISR) Captain,
United States Coast Guard Auxiliary*

If you saw the movie "Marathon Man", you will surely remember Sir Laurence Olivier holding a dentist's drill over Dustin Hoffman's tooth and asking, "Is eet safe? Is eet safe?" Poor Dustin Hoffman kept asking "safe about what??" – until he started screaming... Your boat may pass its vessel safety check – which means it at least meets Federal minimums... But is eet safe...? This column is about that...

Safe For What?

Admiral Halsey is famous for many things but one is noting that, for a thousand years, safety starts at the dock. What are you intending to do with this boat, on this passage, with a certain mission or task in mind – and it is properly outfitted for that. Certainly, meeting Federal minimums sounds more than a little short of the mark if you're intending to head out to the Hudson Canyons for an over-night fishing trip... OK, you've got your required number of flares for the size of your boat and a life jacket for everyone... but are you really prepared for what God's Great Ocean can throw at you..? What are the "optional" items that could open up the safety window for you while the USCG comes charging out to get you...?

Cell Phone vs. VHF Radio

In my mind, the greatest piece of safety gear that you have on your boat is a simple VHF radio ("Sounding Smart on the Radio"; see "Your Radio – Installed Right?"; see "Radio Gain – Shot Gun or Rifle"; see "Rescue-21 – 21st Century Savior".) As you may have read in Monday's newspapers, the USCG saved six sailors off a sinking sailing vessel on Sunday, June 1, 2008. The skipper pressed the "Digital Selective Calling" button on his radio (they all come with that button now) and, since he had connected it to his GPS, it sent his GPS coordinates directly to USCG rescue personnel. Station Shinnecock dispatched one of their vessels (USCG Auxiliarist Joe Tarlentino of Center Moriches was aboard and part of the rescue team) directly to the stricken vessel. The boat sank to the bottom but all six mariners were saved. What if they hadn't had a GPS hooked in to their DSC-equipped radio? Frankly, much the same result would have happened. Rescue-21 would have been able to generate a line of bearing to the boat and the USCG would have raced down that line until they came upon the vessel. What about a cell phone call? To who – your wife? "Honey, send help!" How about the fishing vessel that is a half-mile away – but you don't have his cell phone number... Maybe you can strap the cell phone to a rocket flare and try to hit him with it.

Getting Back Aboard

If you do manage to lose a crewman overboard, or even yourself, how will you get back aboard? If you don't have a collapsible boarding ladder attached to your stern or your swim platform, you'll never get back aboard unless you can pull a "Flipper the Flying Porpoise" and jump into the boat. Get a good one, with at least 3 steps that pull out so you can get your cold and cramped legs onto the bottom step. If you have to pull yourself up to steps that are just too high, you may find it impossible to save yourself...

Money No Object?

It always strikes me as penny-wise and pound-foolish to skimp on safety equipment – such as a GPS or an EPIRB – but the reality is that not everyone is in a position to afford \$5/ gallon gasoline and a \$500 GPS or \$900 EPIRB. Of course, we are talking about saving the life most important to you – yours!

While We Have Your Attention...!

Back on 5/21/08, we wrote about the Open Houses that are going on now at the various USCG stations that makes up "Out East." As noted then, there was going to be an Open House at the Coast Guard Station in East Moriches. Over 200 people, young and old, showed up and enjoyed hot dogs, hamburgers and education about boating safety, paddle sports ideas, marine life and radio communications. This weekend, June 14h, another open house is on tap for the Coast Guard Station in Montauk. Come on out, get fed and educated – especially if you can bring the kids...

Back Copies...

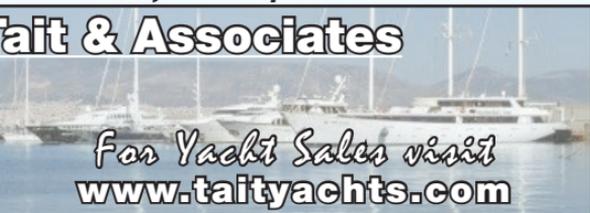
If you want to get copies of the articles referenced above, email me and I'll send you a copy...

If you are interested in being a volunteer member of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2008@aol.com or go direct to MaryJo Cruickshank, who is in charge of new members matters, at FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."

This Week's Column Sponsored By:

Bruce Tait & Associates

(631) 725-4222
1A Bay Street
Sag Harbor, NY



For Yacht Sales visit
www.taityachts.com

Sponsorship of this column is available. All fees raised will be donated by The Independent to Division 18 of The USCG Auxilliary for use in boating safety.

For information call Jim Mackin @ 631.324.2500