

FIRST BOAT

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[Pica: Do You Hear What I Hear?](#)

*Vin Pica continues a look at the sound signals of *The Rules of Navigation*...*

Guest blog by [Vincent Pica](#)

**Chief of Staff and District Commodore-elect, First District, Southern Region (D1SR)
United States Coast Guard Auxiliary**

Last week, the column was all about what to do in restricted visibility when you couldn't see the other vessel but you could hear her. But what did you hear and what is it broadcasting – and do you know how to broadcast your status as well...?



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Toot-Toot, Beep-Beep, Oh how I wish I knew what they were telling me.

Stay alive with Rule 35!

Rule 35 – Sound Signals in “Restricted Visibility”

Rules 32 through 38 are all about “Sound and Light Signals.” They hark back to the days well before radio, much less cell phones and radar. But, be realistic. There just isn't anyway to use a

cell phone to signal a vessel that you only can hear – and unless he also has radar, your radar is telling you a lot but is saying nothing to the counter-party.

For those that enjoy the arcana of the sea and the Rules, Rule 33 specifies the kinds of equipment that can be used for making signals – [whistles, bells and gongs](#). What’s missing? A horn! Horns and motors are in cars. Whistles and engines are in boats!

But horns, schmorns – what are the signals? What are they telling me...?

I hear one “prolonged” (4-6 seconds) blast. What’s the message? A power-driven vessel underway (not fast to the bottom or a dock) making way (engine engaged in propulsion) is out there.

I hear two prolonged blasts (about 2 seconds apart, per the Rule). What’s the message? A power-driven vessel underway (not fast to the bottom or a dock) but NOT making way is out there.

I hear three blasts in succession – one prolonged followed by two short blasts. What’s the message now? Well, that signal, if not a “catch-all”, is a “catch-many.” It could be any of these types of vessels:

1. a “NUC” – a vessel “not under command” – unable to maneuver due to total mechanical failure.
2. a “RAM” – a vessel “restricted in her ability to maneuver” due to the nature of her work.
3. a “CBD” – a vessel “constrained by her draft”...
4. a sailing vessel...
5. a vessel fishing by means of nets or trawling lines (not a Penn reel off the back of a Grady White!) whether underway or at anchor...
6. a vessel engaged in towing, whether by the stern, on the “hip” or pushing ahead...

What is the common denominator here? *Restricted maneuverability*... 3 blasts equal even more than the average amount of complexity... If that vessel is bearing down on you, she cannot get out of your way...

I hear three blasts in succession – one prolonged followed by two short blasts – and then immediately hear four blasts in succession – one prolonged followed by three short blasts! What’s the message now???

That’s the signal from the vessel being towed! She says, “Don’t forget me out here on the end of the 600’ hawser!” If more than one vessel is being towed, it is the responsibility of the last towed vessel to issue the signal.

All of these signals should be repeated no less than every two minutes.

I hear three blasts in succession – one short, one prolonged and one short. What’s the message now? A vessel at anchor... and that signal will come no less than one minute apart. Alternatively, the master of the vessel may decide to ring his bell “rapidly for 5 seconds.” Same message – I am at anchor. Don’t hit me!

What about hearing a “rapidly struck gong for 5 seconds” directly after hearing the rapidly rung bell? Well, try not to hit this guy! Any vessel 100 meters or greater (that’s a football field and then some) is required to ring the bell from the bow and the gong from the stern so you have a chance to judge, hopefully by the relative direction of the two sound signals, how this monster is lying at anchor...

But wait! I heard three “separate and distinct strokes on a bell”, then the bell being struck rapidly for 5 seconds, and then the three claps on the bell again. What the message now?

Oh, the ignominy of it... She is aground...

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux@aol.com or go direct to the D1SR Human Resources department, who are in charge of new members matters, at [DSO-HR](#) and we will help you “get in this thing...”