

Offshore Safety, Sea Survival and First Aid training

Rachel Hibberd joined ARC crews at Hamble School of Yachting's hand-on training course. Like many sailors I can't remember the last time I did any formal sailboat training, but it was probably about 20 years ago. In the meantime I have learned from friends and through the time-honoured method of making mistakes, but I have also forgotten lots of things and possibly become a little complacent. It was time to shake-up my thinking!

There is no substitute for the hands-on experience of sea miles, but despite what the 'salty sea dogs' say, there is always more to learn; and the best way to learn is from the experts. Our three instructors were all highly experienced – a professional delivery skipper, an ex-Royal Naval training instructor, and a Fire Brigade trauma care instructor – and their personal experiences were an excellent addition to the official syllabus.

Having not done any training for many years, I was unsure what to expect, and felt a degree of trepidation about giving up my weekend to sit in a classroom. My fellow students were a mix of ARC and Rally Portugal participants, people considering long-distance cruising, and partners who wanted to feel more confident onboard. Our ages ranged from late 20s to ahem, somewhat older. Some were taking the courses as part of a wider range of formal training, others just looking to brush-up their knowledge. The crew of *And Beyond* had

come from Denmark especially to take the Offshore Safety and Sea Survival courses, as these are not available closer to home.

Ten minutes into the first session we were having a lively debate about how to look after the boat so it takes care of us, and the pace continued through the three days. No time for snoozing at the back as the syllabus is packed and the ideas, recommendations and information came thick and fast. And it wasn't all sitting in a classroom either – we clambered around the sailing school yachts hoisting storm jibs and tri sails, looking at the safety equipment installation and trying out man-overboard recovery systems; we fired flares and fought imaginary fires with a range of real fire extinguishers; we cut wire and rod rigging with bolt croppers; we tried mouth-to-mouth and CPR on dummies; we practiced swimming in full wet-weather gear and lifejackets; and we launched and boarded a liferaft, and then righted an inverted raft.

The courses are designed to improve your knowledge and help you to prepare for the worst situation. We learned practical tips for what to do if the yacht is holed or if a seacock fails; how to manage a gas leak; what to do in case of fire onboard; recovering a man overboard; helping a seriously injured or sick crew; clearing and managing a dismasting; and the ultimate worst-case scenario, abandoning the yacht.

Our instructors made us think about how we would equip and manage our boats in these situations, and how we would prepare

▲ The correct way to enter the water.

▼ Keeping together in a crocodile



▼ Peeking out the lookout port



▲ Its not supposed to be fun!

ourselves if we were crewing or chartering. We learned about the different issues facing yachts and crews who sail offshore, and we discussed the need for independence and self-reliance. As Christian Koefoed-Nielsen, skipper of Psyche (GBR) said: "It has given me serious food for thought, and I am now more alert to what can go wrong and how to fix it." Christian's partner and crew, Suzanna, said that the courses were a real confidence booster: "As a less experienced sailor I found it massively helpful."

The skipper of Beneteau 473 Siren (GBR) added: "You've got to think through the issues and to be prepared in advance for events without scaring yourself to death." Siren completed ARC 2010 without the crew having to put any of their new skills into practice!

While the three courses can be taken individually, it is worthwhile taking a long weekend and doing all three together. I found that the content from one course was reinforced by another, helping me to retain the information. It was an intense three days and I learned a lot, but it was also great fun. When would you normally have a chance to fire a flare or have a go with a fire extinguisher?

At the end of the weekend I felt ready to consider how to prevent emergencies onboard, and capable of managing the situation should the worst happen. The practical experience in the swimming pool and in the liferaft really brought home to me that abandoning to a liferaft is the really the last thing to do, only when all other options have been exhausted. As a fellow student said: "I'd do everything I could to avoid getting into a liferaft."

Getting a fully dressed adult out of the swimming pool is very hard work as water trapped in the clothing adds weight and makes moving awkward. It's impossible to imagine how a casualty could be pulled back onboard a modern yacht without a MOB recovery system of some sort.



Key memories:

Try out your storm sails in the marina to work out the sheet leads and fixing points. You will need a strop for the storm jib tack.

A 75mm diameter hole 30cm below the waterline will let in about half a tonne of water in a minute – too much for any bilge pump.

Yachts can stay afloat when holed - soft furnishings and internal fittings can be stuffed into even a large hole to reduce water ingress.

Throwing water at a fire can cause it to spread – splash the water on. Don't use water on electrical fires though!

It's obvious, but flares (pyrotechnics) get very hot, so protect your hands with gloves.

Using bolt croppers to cut wire is hard work even on land, and lots of leverage is needed. Bernard Sumner (Siren) suggested a battery-powered angle grinder as an alternative.

A fully-laden liferaft is very claustrophobic and hot. No-one enjoyed the experience.

Always give first aid a go – the aim is to prevent the casualty from getting worse.

Make a laminated 'idiots guide' of how to give first aid in an emergency – there may not be time to open a book.



▼ Man overboard hoist



▼ Learning how to float



▼ Trying a tri sail

About Hamble School of Yachting

Hamble School of Yachting is the leading independent sea school in the UK, providing training ashore and afloat. Established more than 30 years ago, the school provides training to over 3,000 people each year.

Hamble School of Yachting is World Cruising Club's official training partner, and offers specific training dates and special prices for World Cruising Club participants.



tuition@hamble.co.uk
+44 (0)23 8045 2668

www.hamble.co.uk



▼ Rigging a storm jib

Dates for 3 day courses in 2011:

06-08 May

15-17 July

Please contact Hamble School of Yachting for more dates and courses.