



NOTES FOR A DELIVERY CREW **IN PREPARATION FOR AN OCEAN PASSAGE**

Preparation for an ocean voyage begins months in advance, and the preparations may differ depending on the length of the intended voyage and the kind of waters you will be passing through. This paper is directed to a delivery crew following a major ocean race.

The safety requirements are stringent for most off-shore races, but there is no oversight of the return passage and normally no support from the organizing committee of the race, so it is critical that the delivery crew be vigilant in their preparations for the passage. Fortunately, there are few incidents of breakdowns and injuries on most ocean races that cannot be handled by the crew, but unfortunately, this does not hold true for the return passage. Often, the racing crew of a boat is vetted by the organizing committee of the race for experience and off-shore experience. However, it is the responsibility of the delivery skipper to recruit a qualified crew. Some skippers and crew of the homeport passage think of this as a cruise and are not as vigilant in selecting a crew with a good background of seamanship. But, remember, these are the same waters, the same problematic current conditions, and equivalent or worse sea and weather conditions as the race, and you have fewer in crew to handle these conditions.

Seasickness is a big issue – not that there is more of it on the passage home than on the race, but the lesser experienced off shore sailor has a harder time dealing with it – very often not being pro-active in taking seasick medicine. A seasick crew like this becomes a passenger – not only has he become a passenger, he is now a patient who has to be watched for dehydration and clumsiness that can lead to injury. And now, for instance, instead of 6 in crew, you now have 5 functioning crew.

So, how can you lessen the chance of having an accident and/or rescue at sea?

One of the first items on your checklist should be to select a qualified crew. Of course you want to assemble a crew that will be compatible and even give someone the opportunity to have this off-shore adventure for his/her first time. However, it is critical to take into account the skills you want covered. The captain needs good leadership skills. You want a navigator who has weather and, if crossing the Gulf Stream, Gulf Stream expertise. Of course you need a couple of good helmsman and competent sail handlers. Now think about who has mechanical skills, electronic skills, who could lead an effective damage control, and do not overlook having two people who have attended a certified First Aid/CPR course within the last year. I say two people, because if the incapacitated person is the one and only medical person, it is a little hard for him to give himself the proper medical attention.

Safety: Prior to the crew's arrival in the port of departure, each crew member should have received a copy of the boat's safety procedures, that includes a stations bill assigning each crew member to his/her duties in the event of an emergency, such as fire, flooding and abandon ship, as well as any other safety material you think appropriate. These procedures should be applicable to the delivery crew, which will have fewer people than the race crew.

It may be advisable to engage a weather router for the return trip. This depends largely on the experience of the Navigator. However, even with an experienced Navigator, the ability to call a first class router to get updates on the weather and suggested changes in routing can be very valuable. In addition, keep your departure schedule flexible, as it might be advisable to delay your departure, or to depart a day or two earlier than you had planned, in order to take advantage of a proper weather window.

Prior to the day of departure, the crew should meet on the boat and review and walk through the safety procedures, locate the safety equipment and thru hull fittings, and practice. In addition, every crew member should be fully acquainted with the use of the SAT phone, VHF, DSC, and if the boat has one, the single side band radio. Crew needs to have assigned life jackets, harnesses and tethers, and understand when they will be used. The delivery skipper and navigator should locate and review the ship's documents

What do you practice? What about all those things you learned in Safety-at-Sea? MOB, fire, flooding, abandon ship, reefing, storm sails and man aloft. You want to send a man aloft anyway to do a careful inspection of all mast fittings. There should be a meeting with the race skipper and captain to do a visual inspection of the sails and boat for any damage or unusual wear on the fittings, bilge pumps, steering gear, running rigging and standing rigging. The crew member in charge of damage control should know exactly what is in the damage kit and where it and other spare parts and tools are stowed. Don't forget to calculate how much fuel you will need for steaming and charging the batteries during the passage.

And, the assigned medical officers should review the contents of the med kit and replenish as necessary. I have each crew member fill out a simple medical information form, requesting height, weight, allergies, chronic medical conditions, diabetes, heart condition, etc., and medicines they are taking. This is all information that a doctor will ask for about the patient should we have to contact a doctor because of illness or injury. Of course, the contact information for medical advice should be prominently displayed next to the Sat Phone.

The list goes on and on – the more you prepare, the more you think of to prepare, and this cannot be done at the last minute. For a major ocean race we start our preparations the summer before the race. That is when we think about crew, the boat and the sails. That's the time also to think about crew selection and preparation for the return passage.

Things happen – it is how well the skipper and crew are prepared that will determine the outcome of an incident.

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