



Man Overboard Recovery For Shorthanded Cruisers

The methods for dealing with Man Overboard emergencies on a short-handed boat require a few modifications from the standard recoveries taught for fully-crewed race boats. The purpose of this note is to highlight those differences in technique and thinking, and to provide references for further skill development by you.

This article assumes you have seen some MOB recovery methods. If you have not, then reading the ISAF Offshore Special Regulations, Appendix D will introduce you to MOB basics. Also watch some of the Lifesling videos on the internet. These resources are linked to elsewhere on the CCA Safety-at-Sea Web pages.

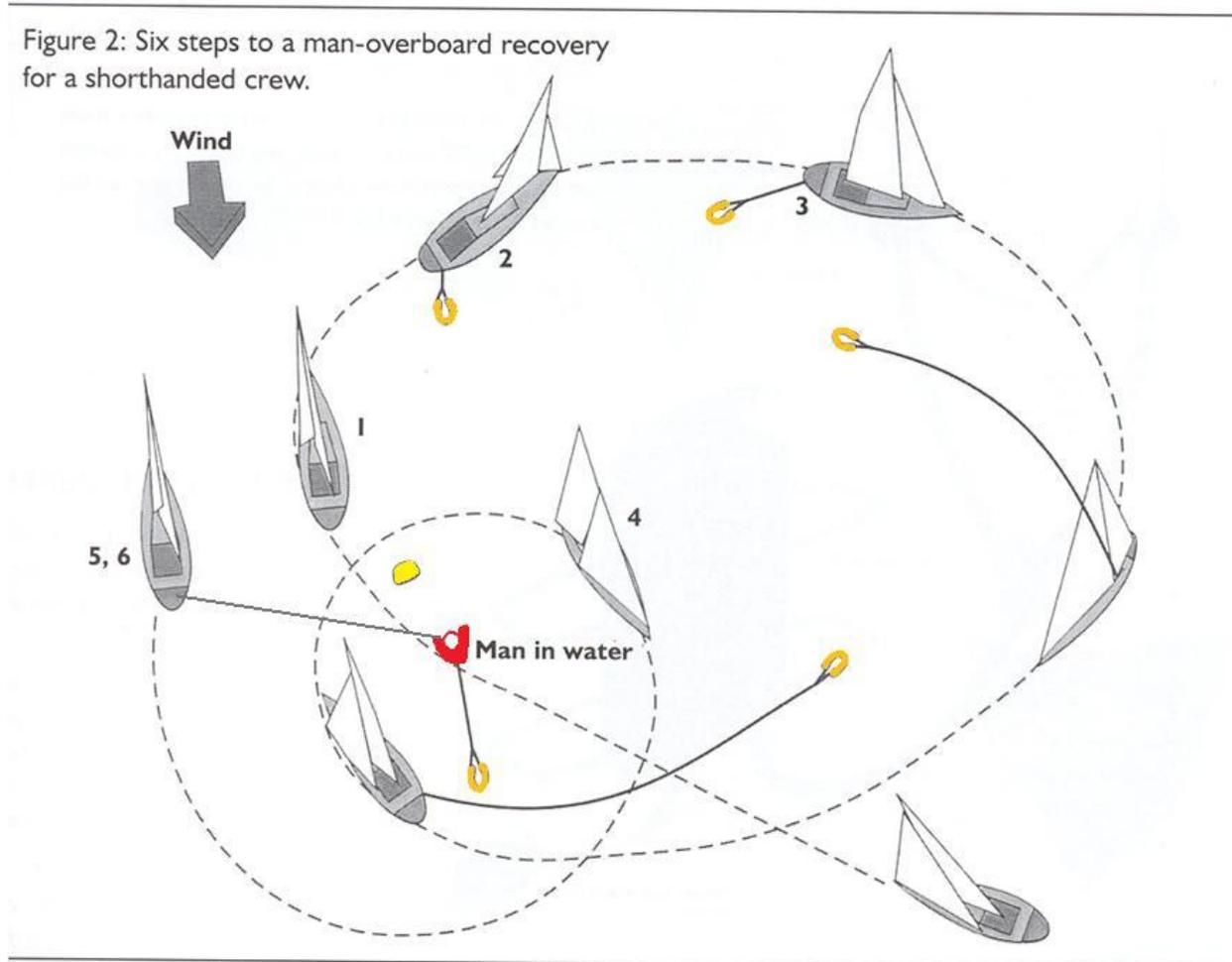
Some Core Concepts:

1. **Stay Close to the Victim to Know Where They Are.** Unlike a fully-crewed MOB recovery, you cannot assign a “spotter” to keep an eye on the MOB at all times. You will have to turn away at some point. Thus, the need to stay close is paramount, so you can quickly re-identify the MOB’s location when you turn your head back. Details below.
2. **Use a Lifesling to Recover the MOB, if possible.** The Lifesling device makes it easier to get in contact to the MOB when short-handed, and makes recovery possible with only one other person aboard. Details below.
3. **Practice.** You will need to go out in your boat and practice to come up with the nuances that will make this work for you.

A Detailed Walk-through Follows:

The “Quick Stop” along with the LifeSling, with slight modifications, is the recommended first recovery method to learn, as it keeps you closest to the victim and minimizes sail handling until the victim is connected to the boat using the LifeSling. ISAF OSR Appendix D shows this maneuver along with a recommendation for short-handed sailing. The diagram from Appendix D for *short-handed* crew is shown below:

Figure 2: Six steps to a man-overboard recovery for a shorthanded crew.



Some Notes:

- At position 1, remember to throw flotation to the MOB first, preferably a MOM-8A or -9 unit, or a Dan Buoy and horseshoe ring, but anything, something. Note, the LifeSling videos do not show deploying flotation, but it is on the ISAF recommended approach. This does two things:
 - Gives the MOB something to float with.
 - Gives the helmsman something much easier to spot. (Victim, swim to the flotation, as a meeting spot.)
- At position 1, tack the jib *without releasing the jib sheet*. This slows the boat down easily, and keeps you close to the MOB. Take a quick look here to make sure you know where the MOB is.
- At position 2, begin to stream the LifeSling (throw it over the side) and start your circle of the MOB.

- At position 3, continue the circle. Unlike the fully-crewed rescue, rolling or dousing the jib is not called for here. This is because you may have to make several circles, and the jib can help those. Do not run around the cockpit adjusting the jib sheets; you should be able to steer through the circle without touching them.
- At position 4, you have circled the MOB, and the trailing LifeSling should soon be near the victim.
- Position 5, the MOB is holding the LifeSling line; YES! Stop the Boat! Now, roll the jib and douse the main, while the person in the water moves along the line to the LifeSling flotation collar. They will pull it over their head. But the boat must be stopped so you don't lose the MOB or pull them under. MOB, if you are being pulled too fast, turn around inside the LifeSling so your back is to the boat.
- Position 6, the boat is stopped and the MOB is attached. Simply pull the person alongside hand over hand.

Getting the MOB Back Aboard, with the victim in the LifeSling harness is straightforward. If your boat has big enough halyard winches, take a halyard directly to the rings on the LifeSling, or to a loop you have tied about four or six feet above the rings (depending on your topside height). If you need extra leverage, use the LifeSling three- or five-part tackle off a halyard. Follow LifeSlings instructions that device. See the LifeSling Video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnhjOhWD4j0> for how to use the tackle.

This video is useful as it shows how to recover a person under a variety of circumstances. (But note that LifeSling videos omit the step of deploying flotation immediately, which is recommended by ISAF in Appendix D, and which I personally suggest. A MOM pylon, or a Dan Buoy is much easier to see than a head in the water.) Make sure the person is facing the hull before you hoist, you do not want to pull them aboard backward.

Some Frequent Questions:

Please note that every MOB incident is a bit different. There are wind, wave, visibility, boat characteristics and point of sail variations from the model give

above. The model is a starting point. You can learn it easily and successfully; many people do so in just a few tries. After that, then try some variations. But remember the core suggestions: stay close to be able to see the MOB, and use a LifeSling, if possible.

1. Using the Engine. Yes, it is fine to use the engine to help you with the circles with the proviso that YOU MUST ASSURE NO LINES ARE TRAILING OFF THE BOAT WHICH MAY FOUL THE PROP and stall the engine. Some boats may need the assist of the engine to circle a few times, and some crew may feel more comfortable with it on too. But (it seems) almost annually a crew loses a skipper overboard, turns on the engine, fouls the prop, and can no longer get back to the MOB. You *and your crew* must learn the basic circles under sail and know you can recover a person under sail. The engine is only an assist in this maneuver.
2. MOB button on your GPS. If you have an MOB button at the helm, then you may push it immediately after throwing flotation and tacking the boat with the jib aback. But if you have to get from behind the helm to the navigation station to push the MOB button, and come back on deck, then you should ask yourself if you want to be away (and out of sight range of the MOB) for that long. On our sailboat the time to go below and back is too long, so the rule is to not use it unless we have lost sight of the MOB and will need to search, and then we set the button at the site of the MOM-8A.
3. Sailing downwind. The model works great for beating and reaching down to a deep beam reach. If you are sailing lower than that, and have some kind of foresail out on a pole, you may have to change some tactics. See the LifeSling video for some ideas that may work on your boat. But why not dump the MOM-8 and tack the boat and backwind a jib to stop the boat from getting farther away from the victim, even on a pole. It means more effort to straighten things out on deck, but *You Have Stayed Close to the MOB*.
4. MOB injured, and cannot get into the LifeSling. Sometimes the MOB can hold on with one hand, you pull them to the boat, a first victory. For hoisting them out of the water, you may be able to get the LifeSling over

them, or fashion a loop from a line to get around the MOB. There are many other schemes that others have worked on. You may have a gale-rider which can be a big net for the victim. There are parbuckles that have been tried. The MOM-9 has a small, one person raft that the MOB could get into to hoist. Again, this is where your seamanship skills will come into play.

Some great reading of results of trying various techniques is the “FINAL REPORT: 2005 CREW OVERBOARD RESCUE SYMPOSIUM By John Rousmaniere” elsewhere on our CCA Safety-at-Sea Web pages, or at: <http://www.boatus.com/foundation/findings/COBfinalreport/COB%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf> This includes multi-hulls and powerboats too, so a must read to go beyond the standard model discussed above.

Above all, you need to PRACTICE the skills described here. Try the standard model of Quick Stop out in your boat. Try it with and without the LifeSling. Try it in different weather and sea states to understand how your own boat responds. Turn the engine on once. Through PRACTICE, you will develop quickly the seamanship skills to recover someone overboard.

But the basics remain, regardless of the system your seamanship devises:

- Stay Close,
- Get the MOB connected to the boat,
- Hoist aboard.