

# The Cruising Club of America

## Safety-at-Sea



*Commodore Lhamon found this jewel in the December 1992 copy of the Cruising Club News. It relates an actual Man Overboard event, with a perfect Quick Stop and Lifesling rescue, at night, at the entry to the Gulf Stream, on a fully-crewed boat during the 1992 Newport-Bermuda Race. The owner and navigator are CCA members and tell a great story!*

### **Man Overboard!**

by E. Llwyd Ecclestone, Jr.

Kodiak, a 66-foot Frers, cruising, racing, central cockpit sloop, racing in the IMS Division of the Newport-Bermuda Race had just tacked onto port to enter the Gulf Stream.

The night was black; the air was filled with a warm rain that had a calming effect on the waves. The water temperature was increasing, to the point our Gulf Stream entry was imminent. The wind had veered enough for us to ease sheets on our large 160 genoa. Brad Dimeo was attaching a short sheet to the genoa for an outboard lead, and I had just uncleated the inboard end of the sheet so he would have plenty of slack.

At 2307 EDT, at 38°53.20N lat 68° 53.27W long, approximately 200 miles SE of Newport, a **“Man overboard”** yell went up from the foredeck.

Steve Mendell on the foredeck got his flashlight on Brad first, and two other lights quickly followed Steve's spot on him. There was Brad in the water clearly looking at us with his visible white-topped oilskins, holding onto the sheet I had released. Ken Read, who was at the wheel, immediately tacked Kodiak, and my older son, Llwyd III, dropped the jib, putting Steve's light out of use as the sail dropped on him. Dan Dyer, our navigator, popped his head out for a moment and, suddenly realizing what was happening, confirmed that Kodiak was tacking when she shouldn't be. He disappeared and saved our position on our GPS and Lorans. Even though Ken had not had the wheel during our overboard practices, there was no way to change helmsmen, and furthermore, he was a "world class" sailor. So I continued on with my crew duties.

Being closest to the preventer on the main, I released it, not realizing that no one was at the back stay runner to release it. Our 26' boom went slamming into the once weather runner, but at least the main was contained.

Ken completed his tack to starboard and headed downwind, passing Brad on the starboard side while Don Watson tossed out one of our two Lifeslings. We jibed around, and Ken brought Kodiak into the wind. It had never seemed more time-consuming to slow down a 66', 65,000 lb sloop.

The adrenaline was now flowing. The crew work was a study in precision - still no talking, no noise, other than the rain. Brad put the Lifesling under his shoulders and was now being dragged behind Kodiak in the sling. Two of us hauled him up to the boat; it was not difficult even though Kodiak was still moving at about two knots. In no time he was along our starboard side and several of us started to haul him up over the 5' high topsides. The silence was broken by Brad who was concerned that we would pull his jacket and Lifesling off in our enthusiasm to get him aboard. Brad, soon safely aboard, casually walked forward to resume his duties as though nothing had happened.

The entire episode lasted less than three minutes but it seemed as though time stood still. It was strange and eerie; the entire crew on deck carried out all the necessary man overboard responsibilities without any direction or conversation. Whatever task was to be done, a crew member was there and the job was carried out with no talk or commotion. The crew was so locked into Brad and their particular responsibilities that there was no doubt in any of our minds that he would be on board soon. He was one of us, all doing our jobs; and it was felt that he never was off the boat.

Ken later told me that the first thought he could recollect was "WOW, this is real!" He had not been at the wheel when Peter Grimm, my opposing watch captain, practiced the overboard retrieval maneuver the first weekend in June. Peter is very organized, and he put the crew through some in-depth overboard drills. Ken was fortunate to be with Peter that weekend as Peter practiced the man overboard drills with the Genoa.

During my practice session the week before, I got the bright idea that we had never done a quick stop overboard drill with a spinnaker up. I had an old spinnaker aboard and wanted to see what would happen when I put Kodiak head to wind with a "chute" up in a good wind. Obviously the objective is to get the chute down before it becomes plastered against the spreaders during the tack. It's a real trick to drop the spinnaker before getting head to wind, which we were not successful in doing the first time, but did better the second time.

The following are some of my observations after a "real life" man overboard experience:

1. Keep at least two separate lights beamed on the overboard person.
2. Stop the boat as fast as possible by tacking, sails trimmed hard.

3. Don't worry about the runners or main sheet until later. Leave weather runner set up for jibe back.
4. Only reason to turn engine on would be to slow down; we did not start the engine. The engine noise could have reduced verbal contact.
5. Don't change helmsmen unless the helmsman panics or has absolutely no experience.
6. The helmsman should only steer the boat and rely on input. He should not try to do any throwing of lines, horseshoes, of sheets, etc.
7. Have available a wide beam, strong power light in case you lose the overboard person from your flashlight beam.
8. We did not deploy the MOM. We probably should have done so, but it would only drop down and we couldn't get it over to Brad. Since the Lifesling was working, we didn't want anything else in the water.
9. I would suggest carrying, in addition to the MOMs, the old fashion type horseshoe life rings, or a cockpit throw cushion, at least one, so someone could quickly and easily throw it to the overboard person. You can't throw MOMs and they are more complicated to deploy.
10. We did not throw the lifeline and I don't think I ever would. Lifeslings are much more effective. I would suggest carrying two Lifeslings and no throw line. Furthermore, the helmsman not only can't, but shouldn't throw the lifeline. The throw line could easily get tangled in the rudder or prop, with a good possibility of jamming both.
11. All crew members should carry their own flashlight on deck. We use an easy-to-pocket, strong, plastic light with a well-defined spot called a Life-Lite, manufactured by Garrity in Madison, CT.
12. If you lose visual contact with the overboard person, after the first pass, you probably would want to drop the main and turn on the engine so you can do navigational sweeps.
13. Buy a Loran or GPS that immediately and continually gives course and distance to the saved location. We didn't need it, and didn't even know that the GPS had

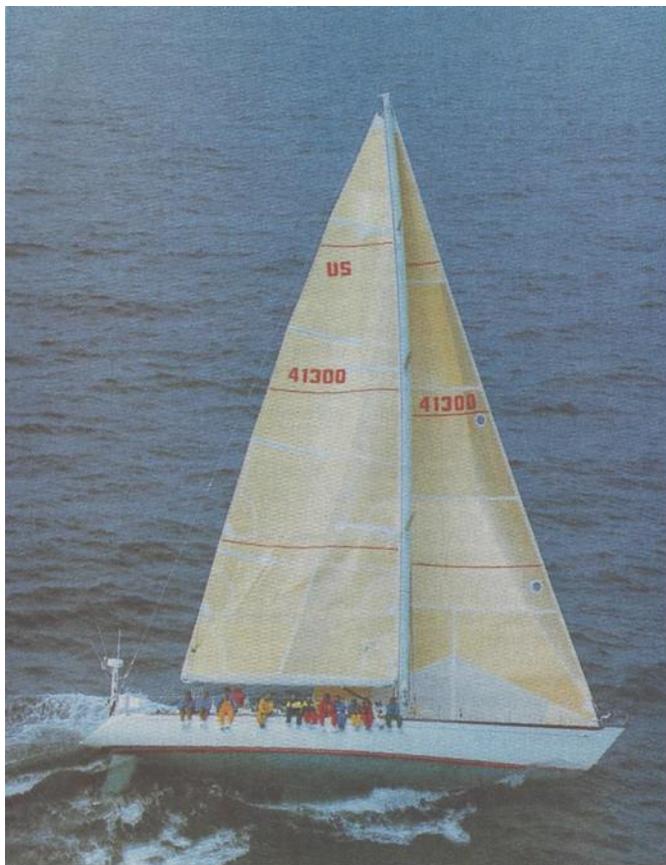
such an automatic, pushbutton capability, but it sure was handy to have the input available.

14. Practice man overboard several times so all helmsmen have the experience.
15. Practice man overboard drills at night.

*Editor's Notes:*

*Wow, what a story, and equally important to study 22 years later, as it all still applies. Each of the fifteen pointers Llwyd posted at the end of the article are true today. I will start practicing nighttime MOB drills! Quick Stop and the Lifesling have saved many, and they are still the first method to try in an MOB situation, whether fully-crewed or shorthanded!*

CCA Contact: Richard York



From CRUISING CLUB NEWS,  
Volume XXXV No.2, December 1992

"Kodiak"

## **Man Overboard !**

© Cruising Club of America, 1992 and 2014