



MANCHESTER CRUISING ASSOCIATION

Marine Accident Investigation Roger Brydges, MAIB 10 May 2007

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch's remit is to investigate accidents involving British vessels anywhere in the world or any ships in UK waters. This includes the 1300 red-ensigned vessels sailing about the world, the 6500 fishing vessels registered in the UK and countless leisure craft. The Board was set up in 1989 after the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster. With currently 40 staff deployed in four investigation teams, they have their work cut out investigating accident involving a spectrum of vessels from supertankers to pleasure yachts. Their function is not to assign blame and they have no powers to prosecute; reports are openly published. You can find plenty more about them at their website <http://www.maib.gov.uk/home/index.cfm>.

One of the surprises was just how much information is often available to the investigator. All large passenger vessels and vessels carrying hazardous cargo have system that records all the information displayed on the bridge as well as sound (and often video) recordings of the activities on the bridge. With this they can sometimes watch and hear the events unfold. It probably wasn't available in the case of the Jackie Moon, a small cargo vessel that was headed up the Irish Sea when news came through that the chief officer's father had died back in the Ukraine. Following an old tradition he had a few drinks but fell asleep as he was conning the vessel up the Clyde on the autopilot. A milkman on his rounds in Dunoon was the first to notice this sizeable ship that had steamed straight up the beach. He raised the alarm.

This was classic comedy but not much else was. Where people did lunatic things they sometimes paid for it with terrible frights or death. But often it was bad luck (an improbable combination of hazardous circumstances for the picky), inexperience or misjudgement that exacted cruel payment.

The Ouzo was on everyone's mind. Roger conjured up those last moments rather vividly in his account as the sailors must have seen the ferry turn directly towards them and keep coming. The accident that followed must have ended the era when many of us bought a thing called a radar reflector for £50+ and hauled it up the mast in the expectation that we could be seen. And I'm sure it's going to be the summer of crotch-straps with the realisation that lifejackets don't work to their full potential unless you're wearing one when you fall in and even then, without crotch straps, you might just slip away anyway.

The Wahkuna was a nice new Moody 47 when she set off across the Channel from Dielette to Hamble with a forecast of fog. She had a nice new radar set too that no-one on board had any experience of. When the fog descended mid-Channel they must have been pleased yet apprehensive to see a large target a few miles to starboard; a foghorn confirmed its presence. The skipper decided

that the target would pass 1.5M ahead and cut the engine, the yacht drifted to a near standstill. The radar watch was abandoned and all eyes were strained to see the target to starboard when a bulbous bow appeared out of the murk to port and ripped the front off the yacht. They had just enough time to take some photographs for insurance purposes before leaping into the liferaft and watching the Moody sink. The skipper was convinced for a while that the target had turned around to come and get him. In fact, his slowing boat had turned from a northerly to a southerly course without anyone realising. The target turned out to be the 66,000 t Nedlloyd Vespucci making 25 knots through the fog; its master had watched some yachtsman he thought would cross comfortably ahead of him unaccountably stop. With little time to think, he decided he would probably miss him.

Was planning to sail on a delivery across the Atlantic without stormsails a misjudgement? Was not having any way of receiving weather forecasts they could understand a good idea? Or was the initial decision to press on in a force 9? Or was the decision to run for shelter on a lee shore? Maybe there was an error in lining up with the channel into Sables d'Olonne but, whatever, the yacht was flipped over by a large wave and one man drowned.

So there were plenty of examples of human error (and after all who else can err?) when someone had been edged (or edged themselves) into a situation they weren't ready for. Seldom could you blame the boat so the one example where you thought you might was sort-of welcome. The Max Fun 35 Hooligan V, a successful racer, capsized off Salcombe in good weather when her keel broke off. Roger couldn't say much but showed us a photograph of a sister vessel with the same keel: a narrow six-foot blade with a hydrodynamic lump carrying half the weight of the boat on the end. It gave any cruising sailor the heeby jeebies just to look at it.

There were some good chilling instructive stories well told here. It was a provocative prelude to a carefree summer break in proceedings and members went off to toy pensively with their favourite radar reflectors and snap up the last few crotch straps available in the northwest.

GM

©Manchester Cruising Association 2007