

Subject: Man Overboard

Author: A. Hall, Technical Director, M.I.A.

Man overboard is possibly the most feared of all catastrophes at sea because of the difficulties it presents to the crew on board of effecting a quick rescue without endangering the vessel.

It is necessary to go over the manoeuvres in one's mind and mentally rehearse the manoeuvres that would be required to effect a rescue. The normal panic that this accident would produce should be greatly reduced if not eliminated thereby allowing the crew to act instantly.

The first step is to throw a float over in an attempt to mark the position and give the person in the water something to hold him up until you can get back to pick him up. A crew member should be allotted to keep his eye on the victim.

The next step is to get down any sail that may interfere with manoeuvring: spinnaker, etc. The approach should be made up wind so that on the final approach a LUFF UP will allow the boat to lose way and if necessary drift down wind to make the pick up.

The following outlines of manoeuvres may assist you to plan your own methods of coping should the occasion arise.

1. If running with a spinnaker set get it down as quickly as possible and re-set the jib. By this time sufficient distance will be available to effectively sail back up wind to your crew so that the boat can be brought round hard on the wind and kept on this tack until a change of tack will bring you up to your crew man. Make your approach just as if to pass down wind and then luff up so as to be in irons as you come alongside to make the pick-up.
2. If tacking hard on the wind continue on until at least 50 yards from your pick-up point and then ease out to a full run and jibe. Run down wind until your pick-up is off the beam when you can start to sheet on and come round slowly so as to be able to luff up as previously described.

These are the basic methods recommended and variations can be thought about and practised at any time such as sailing up to a mooring buoy or simply picking up a friend who has been swimming.

As trailer-sailers do not normally carry life buoys on the push-pit, consideration should be given to the wearing of life-jackets in any kind of sea way, especially when reducing sail. In conditions requiring this, especially when working on the fore deck, safety harness ought also to be considered.

As for retrieving a crew member lost overboard, thought might be given to having immediately available a soft plaited line with a loop permanently bowlined at one end, suitable for placing under the arm-pits of the victim. Such a line could double as a launching/retrieving line.