



Nautical Musings

by Captain Stan Glatzer

Fulfill Your Responsibilities

Congratulations! You are now a "boat owner". The next 25 years will teach you that this is a long way from considering yourself a Skipper (S). One of the first lessons you will learn is that just like an automobile operator, a vessel operator, skipper (small s) and Skipper (capital S), have certain legal responsibilities that, should you not accept and discharge them, could result in very serious consequences.

Stories of boat owners who never even reached the skipper (s) level of competency are many. Incidents where skippers (s) failed to demonstrate a Skipper's (S) level of command are also evident. A few examples of a lack of acceptance of the responsibility that comes with boat ownership are described below. See if you would have been rated a Skipper (S), a skipper (s) or a "boat owner" if you were on scene at the time of the occurrence.

(1) A 20-25 foot sailboat is attempting to transit the Shinnecock Canal heading north while the locks are open and the current is heading south. Equipped with a small auxiliary engine with a capability of producing six knots, the best the vessel can do is to maintain position in the center of the canal, making no way against the current. This situation continues for almost 10 minutes before the current catches the vessel's bow on the starboard side and turns the boat broadside to the flow, eventually sending the boat crashing into the bulkhead on the western side of the canal and causing major damage to the vessel. What actions would you have taken if you were (1) the skipper (s) of the sailboat, (2) a power vessel Skipper (S) heading north in the canal, or (3) a person standing on the side watching the boats or fishing?

(2) A storm had been forecast for 24 hours over the TV, VHF and all weather stations to hit the Great South Bay Area of Long Island at

approximately 3 p.m. on Labor Day. At 1:30 p.m., I was returning to Carmans Creek with a student on a Tartan 24 sailboat when we encountered a Mariner 18 sailboat venturing forth from the Tanner Park launch site in Copaigue with an elderly couple on board. Pleasantries were exchanged between my student and the couple, and I mentioned to my student that it seemed foolhardy to be going sailing with the forecasted blow so imminent. He explained that the man and woman were experienced sailors and probably were aware of the oncoming weather. The 70-mile per hour winds that lasted for 20 to 25 minutes arrived on schedule at just after 3 p.m., capsizing the sailboat and sending the elderly couple into the water. The woman was able to hold onto the craft and subsequently was rescued. The man, unfortunately, was lost. What action, had I taken it when we met the couple, more than likely would have prevented the catastrophe? Had I demonstrated adherence to a Skipper's (S) responsibility?

(3) Just this past month, approximately one-half mile south of the Bay Shore Marina, a collision occurred between two small powerboats, throwing three youngsters into the water without PFDs. The sharp ears of a passenger aboard the dinner boat *Laura Kristy* caught the sound of voices in the water at about 10 o'clock in the evening as the dinner dance cruise was returning to the dock. After convincing the DJ to stop the music, everyone found that the voices were clearly evident and Captain Mike was notified of the situation. The ensuing rescue of two of the youngsters by the *Laura Kristy* and recovery of the third by a police boat were successful because the sharp-eared passenger, the *Laura Kristy's* crew and the Islip Town Marine Police were diligent in recognizing their responsibilities.

(4) A group of relatives was fishing off Captain's Island in Long Island Sound the day after a hurricane had passed when the engine gave up the ghost and died. Eight- to ten-foot swells threatened to capsize the 35-year-old, 30-foot World War I captain's launch. With no radio, flares expended and the American flag displayed "upside down", the vessel and the seven aboard were drifting east down the sound, in the current.

Out of the south came a 20-foot runabout, G-D knows from where or why, passing close by the stricken boat. The skipper (s), (I question even this classification since he had no business being out in a vessel of that size in such weather, but thank G-D he was), screamed that he could not offer a tow but would notify the shore authorities that we were out there.

An hour and a half later, a 65-foot yacht from the Stanford Yacht Club arrived and as professionally as the U.S. Coast Guard would execute, proceeded to heave us a line and tow us into Stanford Harbor.

What were the responsibilities of neighboring vessels to assist in the above scenarios? What actions were lacking by those in command of the vessels concerned? What steps can be taken to prevent future incidents similar to those above from occurring again? How well acquainted are you with the responsibilities you have incurred by the ownership and operation of your boat? It is my opinion that the commonly believed concept that a boat in the water, regardless of size, is to be "driven" like a car on the highway has led to more disastrous situations than any other aspect of boating.

Please write to us about these episodes and we'll publish your valued opinions next month. Use your name or not - we want your reactions as boaters.

Thank you.



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