



by Captain Stan Glatzer
A Competent Crew

Question: Captain Stan, You write about Skippers (S), skippers (s) and boat owners and how they should act on their boats. How does a person act as a good crew when they are on someone else's boat?

Dorene, Smithtown

Answer: Your question is one that should be asked by everyone who is invited to spend the day on the water with a friend. Guests are invited onboard and when asked, they should question whether or not they are expected to help or be catered to as passengers. If the latter is to be their assignment, they should question what the safety procedures are that they should follow. You will notice that I say "question" and do not prefer to assume what my duties, if any, are.

A good crew is in constant demand and many crewmembers spend more time on the water

than most boat owners. The fact that you own a vessel does not guarantee that you will use it. A great deal of the enjoyment of boating is the sharing of the experience with another. Many who are qualified as Skippers (S) are happier when having a crew to assist in line handling, docking, navigating and a host of other tasks. Sailors are always searching for racing crew and cruisers are searching for help with the sails and boat handling. I taught a young college student to sail and crew who progressed so well that she eventually crewed every weekend and on some very long voyages, on some very large yachts, never having a boat of her own.

The act of becoming a good crew begins by establishing a mindset that recognizes the importance of preparation and looking ahead for what will be required by the Skipper (S) in the next execution of boat operations. Knowing where, when and how to perform the skills such as marlinspike, (rope and knots), line handling during a docking exercise, use of fenders, and keeping things shipshape and neat onboard are the minimum requirements for a competent crew. Crews should wait for the Skipper's (S) command before attempting the task, but by being in the right place at the right time, with the proper materials, a crew provides the Skipper (S) with the confidence that will result in a future invitation. At the top of the list of requirements for a successful crew is the possession of an optimistic and upbeat attitude.

Get experience by going out with Skippers (S) who have a desire to teach. You can boat with many operators and learn nothing, or worse, the wrong techniques. Find the man/woman

whom others talk about as being a Skipper (S). He or she is out there; you just have to search (see note).

Question: Captain Stan, I have a 23-foot center console, walk around boat and use it on Great South Bay in Long Island. The boat is used for fishing and water skiing or to go to the beach at Fire Island. We never stay out overnight. I have a GPS Chartplotter and a compass to help with the navigation. I rarely use the compass since I have one on the GPS. How important is it for me to learn coastal piloting if the Great South Bay is only three and a half miles wide and I don't have to worry about high waves?

Victor, Patchogue

Answer: Victor, Have you ever been lost while driving a car in the middle of a city? If so, wouldn't it have helped if you had a map of the city? Have you ever been on the water in a fog? Wouldn't it have been helpful to have known the water depth in case you needed to anchor? Most chart plotters do not indicate depths in shallow bays; large-scale paper charts do. GPS monitors indicate courses steered and deviation made from the intended course. Tidal range, current direction and speed are factors that can cause the deviation, and knowledge of these happenings is not indicated on a GPS.

Predicting these factors can affect your chosen course and the destination, resulting in the difference between a pleasant day's trip or a day with all on board complaining "When will we be home?"

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Weather forecasts are available on TV, AM/FM radio, VHF and your personal computer, but how many times is the local weather different from the forecasts? Knowing how to read the signs that will allow you to prepare for an oncoming squall or a fog that is creeping up on your position cannot be found on your GPS chart plotter.

Recognition of a buoy's color, shape and labeling is good, but not good enough. The interpretation of these factors is as important as is the ability to read regulatory street signs and street names when driving your car. Going where and when in a traffic situation is completely different on the water. Road

conditions as to dangerous obstacles appear on charts and GPS screens, but must be interpreted in order to proceed safely.

Responsibilities you have incurred as a vessel operator are greater than you have when operating your car (see "Nautical Musings" this issue).

A basic Boating Safety course is the minimum education for a boat operator. These courses are introductions to the

various aspects of recreational boating. marlinspike, compass reading, safe loading, chart reading, basic traffic laws (collision regulations), boat handling, and man overboard retrieval. These courses are similar to a "flasher" display and only indicate that there is a whole lot more to learn about the subjects. Coastal piloting is a special area of expertise, and knowledge of the subject will increase your enjoyment on the water and respect for the differences between driving a car and "skipping" your boat.

NOTE: Capt Stan conducts seminars for groups on "Becoming a Competent Crew" (captstan@optonline.net) (631-273-5345).

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