



The Ray Maki Series Race 4

- Man Overboard Incident and weather

- Saturday, November 7, 2015

This report outlines the overboard incident involving “Tintagel” and weather conditions associated with this race which resulted in an abandonment of the race together with outcomes in a “Lessons Learned criteria”.

Contents

1. The conduct of the race.	2
a. The Weather:	2
b. The race briefing and the conditions that prevailed:	2
2. On the Course and the Incident:	3
a. The Club Captain – comments and request for Skipper/Vessel input/comment:	4
b. The Race recorded by the OOD:	4
c. The Incident as recorded by the Skipper of Tintagel – Colin Bishop:	5
d. The day and weather as recorded by the Skipper of Drizabone – Tom Fricke:	6
e. The day and weather as recorded by the Skipper of Tiercel – Colin Gibbs:	6
3. Outcomes of this Race and Lessons Learned:	7
4. Recommendations:	7

1. The conduct of the race.

a. The Weather:

The race was to be conducted in good conditions with seven (7) vessels competing with a weather forecast predicting a wind strength of up to 20 knots moving from the west to south / southwest in the morning. (as under)

An ebbing tide was to be present but at the time could have been seen to not having a big influence given the wind.

Saturday 7 November

A weak cold front west of Tasmania will cross Bass Strait on Saturday morning briefly reinforcing a southwesterly airstream.

WINDS: West to southwesterly 15 to 20 knots tending south to southwesterly in the morning.

SEAS: Around 1 metre, increasing to 1 to 1.5 metres during the morning.

WEATHER: Partly cloudy. 50% chance of showers in the morning.

b. The race briefing and the conditions that prevailed:

At briefing at noon in the harbour all skippers and crew assembled.

The Commodore outlined some domestic items and welcomed some new sailors to the race activity for the day. These new sailors were allocated to vessels as appropriate with all documentation of

- a. sign on for skippers/vessels together with
- b. a crew list by vessel.

The Club Captain briefed the group with weather details as above from BoM being the latest available and whilst the wind strength was high it varied around the maximum indicated by BoM.

The OOD in Ian Lee reinforced the Club Captain's comments on the weather.

Further comments related to Vessel and Radio declarations outstanding and insurance of vessels for club records.

There was to be three (3) divisional starts with the first at 1.30pm, second at 1.40 pm and last at 1.50 pm. The slower and smaller vessels compete in the first division, medium keel vessels start in the second division with the largest keel boats starting last in the last division.

Briefing completed all made their way to competing vessels before venturing out into Port Phillip Bay.

2. On the Course and the Incident:

The course that was chosen based on the conditions on the course proper by the OOD (Ian Lee) was course #6 of the standard courses used by the club and under normal circumstances was appropriate for the weather conditions and predominately the wind direction.

Course #6 was a Grass Beds start followed by a leg to Pope's Eye Pile, Wedge Pile, Grass Beds, Pope's Eye Pile, Wedge, Swan Spit, Wedge and finish at Grass Beds.

Competitors saw upon leaving the "Cut", that the weather was more than expected in wind velocity and was gusting quite strongly from the south west with white caps on waves indicating a minimum 20 knot wind and possibly greater further afield.

All vessels, as is protocol, signed on with the OOD (VHF channel 72), indicating their crew numbers and vessel designation.

As time approached for the start sequence of countdown, most, if not all vessels had some form of reef in their sails, with most having a first reef in their main and had either changed headsails, or decided on less sail than previously thought possible for the race.

During the actual countdown procedure (between 1.25 and 1.30 pm) it was noticed by a couple of vessels that "Tintagel", a small composite keelboat/vessel, had apparently lost a member of crew in Ian Curtis, who was in the water, with life jacket inflated. He was visible in the waves, with his vessel being helmed by skipper Colin Bishop moving away from Ian Curtis in the water but preparing to jibe back to retrieve Ian.

The vessel was to the east of the entrance to the "Cut" and traveling to east/south at the time.

A radio call from Colin Bishop, skipper of Tintagel to the OOD on Swan, the rescue vessel, at first went unheeded, as calls during race sequencing and preparation are by protocol not answered until the sequencing is finished post 1.55 pm in normal situations minutes of Ian Curtis being overboard.

The call did not mention a standard phrase of either "Pan Pan" or "Mayday" as can be applied to an emergency and thus was not seen by the OOD as an important call to be responded to at the time.

As can be seen from the report by skipper of Tintagel, Colin Bishop, and a swift rescue by the OOD's on Swan resulted in Ian Curtis being assisted on board Swan within approximately five (5) minutes of his entering the water.

Ian Curtis was taken by Swan into the harbour, which was only a few minutes away, and was met by Tintagel and skipper Colin Bishop who had withdrawn from the race and proceeded to their mooring in Swan Bay to recuperate.

Ian Curtis although in good shape following the incident, was quite cold once retrieved from the water, but did manage a solid cup of warm fluid once inside the confines of the harbour, on Tintagel's mooring.

The Commodore called Ian subsequently and he attested to his wellbeing post the event.

a. The Club Captain – comments and request for Skipper/Vessel input/comment:

“Firstly my apologies for the abandonment of yesterday’s Ray Maki Race 4 in the series.

Within the context of briefing yesterday and from the confines of the harbour, consistent with the BoM forecast (they did not issue a Strong Wind Warning), it appeared to be a good day for sailing and racing.

However, on the Bay things turned out a little differently with a stronger than forecast wind in gusts measured by some at 27 knots. Whilst the OOD was a little more sheltered inshore, once venturing a few hundred metres offshore there was certainly more in it!

Additionally during the Race Start procedure, we had the unfortunate incident of Ian Curtis being dumped overboard from Tintagel, with the result that the race was temporarily postponed whilst Ian was rescued most hastily and cared for by our OOD’s. Thanks to Ian, Bev and Jock.

Whilst I was on board Sundance with the Commodore, it was observed that the weather was not going to ease and the situation for most vessels was to reef and change down on sail area and when taken into account with the course off to Pope’s Eye Pile and Wedge structure Skippers and crew could have been very tested. Weather has been known to be more of a problem around both these structures with possible consequences.

Given all that, I decided on the course of action to abandon the race and make life easier for all concerned, even though the OOD’s had commenced a second count down sequence for the race start.

I do trust this action was received graciously and in the spirit of our racing rules of not racing in exceeding 25 knots conditions.

As a result of the incident with Ian and as prescribed in our club “Sailing Instructions”, I will be making a report to the committee and have requested a couple of reports from skippers closest to the action, but would welcome any comments in regard to yesterday be forwarded to me in the next 24 hours to enable me to accurately construct that report.”

b. The Race recorded by the OOD:

The race records as discussed with the Commodore and Club Captain signified the following results:

1. The weather outlook was within the range predicted at the time the course was selected and this course related to these conditions. The course was #6 from the standard set of courses and was based on a southerly wind.
2. During the countdown to the first division start, post 1.25pm it was heard a call from a vessel “Swan, Swan, Swan” but nothing more. There was no reason at that point to consider an emergency and the call as was normal in the circumstances was discounted.
3. However it was then brought to our attention by another call that a man overboard situation (MoB) had occurred with Tintagel, and skipper Colin Bishop was heading back to attempt

retrieval of Ian Curtis who was in the water. We did not immediately see Ian in the water due to wave action but did so as we approached.

4. As OOD's, we immediately flew the postponement flag, hoisted anchor and headed toward the MOB reaching him and directing Ian Curtis to the stern where he used the ladder on Swan to climb aboard.
5. Quickly realising that he was ok, we discussed the situation and agreed to return him to the harbour a few hundred metres away, and back on board Tintagel to reunite him with his skipper, ensuring his welfare was safe.
6. As OOD we returned to the race course and having anchored again recommenced a start sequence for the race, given that all other competitors were awaiting instructions and flags for the race commencement.
7. All other vessels in the race were continuing to prepare for the race start during and immediately post this incident.
8. However within a few minutes, the Club Captain on board Sundance called on the VHF interrupting the sequencing of race start, instructing the OOD's to abandon the race because the conditions were greater than expected and had exceeded the "Club Sailing Policy" of maximum wind strength of 25 knots, even though the Weather Bureau (BoM) had not issued a "Strong Wind Warning".
9. As OOD, we responded confirming the decision and advising all vessels accordingly. Most had heard the previous call but we ensured that all skippers and vessels were aware of the decision to call off the race.
10. We ensured all vessels were ok in the circumstances and we packed up Swan and returned to the pen and safety of the harbour.
11. It is my opinion that the original radio call made by the skipper of Tintagel should have been "PAN, PAN - 3 times" or in the case of danger to life "MAY DAY, May Day - 3 times" and I suggest that the club holds a few classes on correct radio procedure, so that all sailors have the knowledge of how to use the radio in an emergency.
12. I hope that these comments can be put to use – signed Ian Lee

c. The Incident as recorded by the Skipper of Tintagel – Colin Bishop:

"7/11/15 about 1-20 PM, Ian Curtis was catapulted off the foredeck while hoisting a jib. The vessel was in the approach to the Creek, heading east. Tintagel was hit by strong gust and heeled to port at the same time as she crossed a steep little sea about 30 cm high.

Ian was wearing a self-inflating jacket which inflated immediately.

I put the engine into neutral, jibed and sailed back to his position.

He was unable to get aboard. I could not slow the boat completely because the jib was neither up nor down and I could not heave to.

I called Swan and she came and got Ian out of the water and returned him to Tintagel.

We withdrew from the race.

This was the first time anyone has gone overboard in twenty five years of sailing this vessel, and I regard the incident as a consequence of an unusual combination of circumstances; because of the lack of sea room and the proximity of commercial vessels, my courses of action were quite limited. However - correct decision at briefing, and correct decision later on the water."

d. The day and weather as recorded by the Skipper of Drizabone – Tom Fricke:

"The BoM forecast was for winds to ease as they turned southerly by mid to late morning, but this did not actually eventuate (at South Channel Island) until 10-30pm when they dropped down to 10 knots, whilst winds there throughout our normal 1 – 4 pm racing timeslot were running at 20 -26 knots

We had a reasonably strong crew of four and could only just rig up and manage "Drizabone" with a storm jib and reefed main – and even then she was a handful. The only calmish conditions seemed to be at Grass Beds, and the combination of an ebb tide and an opposing south-westerly wind set up rather heavy seas not far out from the Creek Pile and beyond. In such conditions rounding Pope's Eye Pile, in particular, (ie as required by Course 6) would have been quite hazardous.

After lasting about an hour in those conditions, we were already exhausted – and by 2-00 pm we were actually quite relieved to see the abandonment flag displayed.

Thus the skipper and crew of Drizabone fully support the decision made by you as Club Captain on Saturday, and believe that it was in the overall best interests of all crews involved."

e. The day and weather as recorded by the Skipper of Tiercel – Colin Gibbs:

"Tiercel folk agreed at the time it was the wise decision. No comment or observation from me on the m.o.b. as we were far away dealing with our own challenges.

Record of winds showed it stayed between 20 and 25 with a few gusts beyond that, for the course of the afternoon. And once the forecast is seen to be wrong who knows which way it is going to go.

The other factor was a number of new participants (or experimental sailors), on Sundance (thanks John!) and we don't want to put people off by frightening the daylights out of them.

So, yes, while disappointed that we did not have the race in conditions that would "suit" our chances, there was no criticism of the decision. It does justify the policy of insisting on radios being carried."

3. Outcomes of this Race and Lessons Learned:

As we previously have said, understanding the issues involved and the essential elements of the events of the race should assist the club to make decisions and changes for the future betterment of racing with QLYC.

- a. The OOD in Ian Lee accompanied by Bev and Jock Lee on Swan have given their version of the circumstances with this Man Overboard incident and made comment regarding radio calls relevant to the situation.
- b. The call by Skipper Colin Bishop was incorrect given the circumstances, particularly as it applied to a call during the countdown to race commencement and therefore would have significantly greater affect to action had it been a "Pan Pan".
- c. Skippers and crew need to understand that everyone in an emergency has a requirement to assess the situation correctly and ensure that a radio message carries the correct interpretation of events.
- d. In this instance it was in the club's and Ian Curtis favour that the incident occurred within close distance of the rescue craft in Swan and not out in the bay when minutes turn into many minutes before help is at hand.
- e. As an aside Colin Bishop reported that whilst Ian Curtis (as man overboard) was wearing a self-inflating lifejacket and this worked perfectly in the circumstances but, Ian did not have a crutch strap fitted to his life jacket which resulted in his jacket sliding up around his neck and throat, to a point of restricting his breathing. He actually considered trying to ditch his life jacket for this reason but did not.
- f. Other vessels would no doubt have responded or made themselves available to attend the incident site had they been required although there was a suggestion that at least one radio was malfunctioning on the day. This needs careful consideration when making the login call before the race and receiving an understandable reply.

4. Recommendations:

In light of the above information and input the following actions have and will be taken.

- a. Overall correct procedures were followed with the exception to the incorrect call reporting the emergency during race preparation to the OOD. The incident was handled with great efficiency and all vessels in the vicinity stood by. There does need to be emphasis on correct radio protocol to ensure an appropriate response.

- b. The OOD's response to the incident was copybook and they are commended for their actions with flag signals, rescue and post rescue management. No doubt the electric anchor winch installed some time ago assisted the efficiency of the operation.
- c. On the basis of both the decision to abandon and the subsequent comments from Skippers, the call to abandon the race was correct and warranted, especially as the club policy dictates a 25 knot maximum wind speed as the dictum for a cancellation of event or abandonment. This should continue.
- d. A decision to race in higher wind strengths above 20 knots should always be a counter for which course will be sailed on the day, irrespective of a specific direction of wind. Courses involving Pope's Eye Pile, Wedge and Drapers, when stronger winds are involved, should effectively be discounted in these cases.
- e. On the basis that recovery of someone from the cold waters of Port Phillip Bay, even with reasonable speed, would put a person in a state of shock and certainly lower core body temperature it would be advantageous for the rescue vessel "Swan" to carry as part of its emergency kit a couple of thermal blankets for such instances.
- f. The use of self-inflating life jackets is a bonus for persons in an overboard situation BUT the wearing of a "Crutch Strap" should be considered as recommended, if not mandatory, when wearing any life jacket particularly with single handed sailing and should be worn as the outer layer, especially when wearing several layers of clothing.
- g. This report again highlights the importance of a Debrief and Reporting of Incidents during club racing and these will be expected to continue especially when materially important events occur.
The Sailing Committee and Club Captain will be instrumental in ensuring such procedures are followed.
Additionally all reports and Minutes of Sailing Committee be placed on the agenda of the General Committee of the club.
- h. Further and as emphasis on safety which is paramount for club racing, the utilizing of fixed marks or objects be addressed with all skippers and club vessels before the start of the season, and that at briefings, significance be placed on mentioning the danger especially during periods of excessive wind combined with tidal activity.



Brian Golland - Club Captain