

Life Sling, Don't Leave Home Without It!

I found the Review Committee Report on the fatal accident on TP 52 IMEDI Feb 29 2019 in the Mackinaw race. The report states that the boat practiced the man overboard (MOB) in the harbor by throwing a hat in the water and motoring back to pick it up with a boat hook. This is the exact same procedure they tried to do in a 25-knot storm with 5 to 8 foot breaking waves. Here is my understanding of what happened.

Paragraph 6.8 The crew should be wearing harnesses in 20 to 25 knot winds and hooked in to jack lines. No harnesses and no jack lines were ever deployed. There are also no hand holds in the cockpit for the crew to hold on to in high seas and heeling 20 degrees. After MOB occurred, the helmsman did not start the engine which is necessary to control the boat and to get the sails down. The helmsman chose to sail the boat back to the MOB. The boat's design does not enable fast sail control by the crew. No reef lines for the main. 6.10 First Pass: The Helmsman expected the MOB to swim with his foul weather gear on the 15 feet to the boat as the boat sailed by. The MOB inflatable life vest did not inflate. 6.11 Second Pass: With breaking waves hitting the boat and the engine on, the helmsman maneuvered the boat to come up along side the MOB and throw jib trims to the MOB. This procedure should never be attempted in high winds. The seas picked the boat up and rolled it over the MOB which left the MOB to port and the boat drifting away. No MOB life vest inflated. 6.17 Third Pass: MOB is 6 feet from the boat amid ship with crew members reaching under the life lines to grab the MOB's hand and throw jib trims. The MOB becomes hypothermic, exhausted, unable to function and sinks. Rescue of the MOB was not successful.

In the last sentence of this paragraph 6.16.2 "...one crew member noticed the MOM-8, Life Sling and Throw rope were all still on IMEDI's aft rail, UNDEPLOYED." During a race all the crew will helm the boat, therefore all the crew must know what to do in a MOB which is vital for a successful rescue. This particular helmsman followed the instruction that he observed during the harbor drill. The MOM-8 (Man Overboard Module) marks the spot where the crew left the boat and the crew member was lost. Another safety device, the throw sock would never make it to the MOB in high winds and he or she will never be able to swim to the line. Therefore, the only functional MOB piece of safety equipment on a boat is the Life Sling!

When the Life Sling was first invented and marketed, I brought it to the attention of the GYA Offshore Committee Chairman who was young and immortal. He told me, "if he fell off the boat he could swim back and jump back aboard". I thanked him for his advice and bought one immediately to place it on whichever boat I would be crewing for in the effort to be prepared for any unexpected incident involving a man overboard. All crew members should be trained in the use of a Life Sling as the person at the helm will ultimately determine the success or failure of a rescue and you will never know for sure which crew person will be on the helm during a MOB.

Ole Tom