



SLIPPERY WHEN WET

While tenders and toys add excitement and fun to any charter, managing these powerful machines is not always straightforward.

by Sara Ventiera



Last summer, two charter guests were killed when they crashed a Yamaha WaveRunner into a concrete bridge support near Star Island on the Intracoastal Waterway just off Miami Beach.

The summer before that, a tender crashed through the side of a yacht hull anchored in Ibiza. The two crewmembers who were driving the tender allegedly fell overboard and were not wearing a kill cord. It was reported that the vessel circled for 15 minutes running at 30 knots before ramming into the side of the larger vessel.

In 2016, a total of 1,860 casualties on open motor boats were reported in U.S. waters along with another 721 reported casualties on personal watercraft (PWC), taking the first and second slots for vessels with the top casualty numbers, according to the United States Coast Guard.

THE SUPERYACHT RESPONSE

Accidents involving yacht toys and tenders happen just about every season; however, the yachting industry has been stepping up to the plate with new training programs to prevent yacht toy accidents and to effectively respond in the event that something does occur.

Regulations governing the use of PWC differ from country to country and in some cases, state to state. In much of the Mediterranean, all PWC drivers are required to hold a license to operate a Jet Ski.

In 2015, the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) and Professional Yachting Association (PYA) teamed up to create a Voluntary Code of Practice for Watersports in the Superyacht Industry. It's meant to offer captains and crew a set of guiding principles to develop onboard safety management plans for watersports. The document explains the best way to create a plan of action for recreational watercraft, starting

with creating guest questionnaires to gauge guest experience with the various equipment on board, as well as what they hope to get out of the experience. This is all before addressing a range of subjects spanning from weather limitations and finding suitable locations to launch toys to guest safety briefings and rescue boats.

ENHANCING OPERATIONS

The RYA and the PYA cover the basics of watersports common in the yachting industry: waterskis and towed inflatables, kiteboards, canoes and kayaks, parascending, hoverboards, and sub aqua activities. However, the bulk of the RYA's recommendations are geared toward the most common yacht accessories – those most often involved in accidents: Jet Skis and tenders. "I think the trigger was a general increase in watersports accidents relating to boats," says Tim Hughes, director of Bristol Maritime Academy. "Over the last five years, there's been a number of tender and personal watercraft accidents." Many of those collisions could have been avoided with some clear planning and guidelines.

One of the keys to keeping guests and crew safe is to start slowly and build skills. Anyone can pull a plastic lever to get some of the faster Jet Skis from zero to 60 within seconds. According to Hughes, those who are unprepared for that kind of speed tend to grip the handlebars harder, fully opening the accelerator. These riders can freeze and could even hit the side of the vessel they were launched from.

To prevent riders from slamming into the hull, Hughes suggests setting an exclusion or no wake zone around the boat (and secretly switching the PWC into "learner mode"). "Guests might like to perform a 'fly-by' to impress their fellow guests but



A Bristol Maritime Academy training session



the yacht will cause a huge blind area where the rider can't see what's happening on the other side," he adds.

Hughes also recommends giving Jet Ski drivers something to focus on, whether it's an imaginary point near the boat where they can slow down before approaching the yacht, or inflatable marks that can be used as a slalom course. (Don't let PWC operators race next to one another!) "If you give someone a high-powered personal watercraft and a blank canvas of water, then they are most likely to initially drive flat out in a straight line, and then try and spray other people with their wake," says Hughes. "Both are likely to end badly."

Guests are more likely to remain engaged and safe if the crew can coach the riders to improve cornering techniques or fun tricks – like wake jumping, which needs to be choreographed very carefully to keep Jet Skis at a safe distance from one another.

CREW TRAINING

It may sound obvious but to be able to coach guests how to safely ride PWC, someone needs to know how to drive them properly. In some areas, like France, it is mandatory that the person driving a personal watercraft be equipped with a license. Having a crewmember certified as a PWC instructor not only covers the vessel from legal requirements, it also ensures that there's someone who can actually teach guests how to properly maneuver Jet Skis.

In 2007, the RYA introduced a PWC certification for private and charter yachts to comply with coastal authorities who require Jet Ski drivers to hold a license. Vessels can issue licenses to guests as long as a certified PWC instructor is employed aboard and the yacht becomes an RYA Recognized Teaching Center. The certification is offered through a variety of training schools, including Bristol Maritime Academy, Aigua Sea School, and bluewater Yachting.

To pass the RYA's Recognized Teaching Center inspection, the vessel must have an operations procedure in place – all vessels should have operations procedures outlined anyway – documenting what is done to make crew and students (guests) as safe as possible. That requires a risk assessment, looking at what could go wrong, how those issues can be prevented, and what to do if something bad does happen.

While RYA's certification focuses on Jet Skis, and to some extent tenders, Hughes says it's important to draw up operations procedures for all toys, ranging from seemingly benign slides and banana boats to newer inventions like jet packs, ski bobs, and hydrofoil surfboards. He admits that figuring out what can go wrong with some of the cutting-edge activities can be far more difficult, as there is less industry guidance in place. "It's as simple as somebody creates a new product, sells a few units, and the owner

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sees it on Facebook or YouTube," he adds. "People start doing this new sport and there isn't any infrastructure or training behind it. It all goes back to what could go wrong with this, how do we control it, and if it goes wrong, how do we deal with it."

It sounds like a big task to figure out what could go wrong; however, there are companies, like Bristol Maritime Academy, that help vessels devise operations procedures for onboard toys. And there are specialists who train crew how to manage an emergency in the water that go above and beyond the basic skills learned in STCW.

Veteran lifeguard and former yacht crewmember Kobi Graham founded Pro Guarding with his brother Aaron to provide crew hands-on training for water safety. The Australia-based company, which focuses on water safety and medical training, oversees all of Red Bull's Big Wave events, as well as Superfoilers, a new sailing race series that circles Australia at speeds of up to 70 miles per hour. The business's main goal in the superyacht realm is to give crew the tools to effectively handle an emergency with three- to four-day customized courses.

While working on a busy charter vessel, Graham saw first-hand the need for technical rescue teaching. "The crew all had basic training, but I don't think anyone was prepared if anything went down," says Graham. "Superyachts have enough medical gear to perform an operation and nobody knows how to use it."

The courses begin with theory, exploring how to tend to major wounds, trauma, and shock with advanced resuscitation, spinal management, defibrillator instruction, as well as a first aid refresh, before using the practical theory in a mock situation. In some scenarios, the crew will have all the information from the start – a guy with a broken neck is face down in the water, maybe after something like a Jet Ski and tender collision, or a surf accident. The crew are asked to get him out of the water and into the tender or onto a Jet Ski sling, then onto the big boat. In other exercises, the crew will be tasked with determining what happened to the victim and how to respond effectively. "It's amazing how many people never thought about it," says Graham. "We designed a course to bridge the gap between basic training and getting people really confident to handle any medical emergency on the boat."

For Graham, this sort of training is personal. About eight years ago, Graham was tow-surfing at Cape Solander when he fell off his board onto the reef. As a lifeguard for 15 years, he knew instantly that he had broken his neck. His tow partner managed to get Graham onto the Jet Ski sling and safely bring him back to land without doing further damage to Graham's spine. Graham's C7 vertebrae was shattered, but he has fully recovered from his injuries thanks to his friend's personal watercraft and water safety training – and that Jet Ski sling.

A friend of Graham's, sadly, was not as fortunate during his surf accident. A lifeguard found Graham's buddy face down on the beach, panicked, and quickly flipped him over. The friend survived but the trauma to his spine left him a paraplegic. Now, Pro Guarding manufactures inflatable Jet Ski sleds, which work like a floating spinal board, to use for

rescues. However, one of Graham's key points of any in-water rescue situation is teaching crew how to immobilize injured individuals in the water with whatever tools are on hand. "Getting someone in a tender is a lot of work," says Graham. "Then you have to drag them on [the] side of [the] boat."

Whether a vessel opts to pay for this type of training or not – or purchase a Jet Ski sling – determining how to immobilize a patient's spine after an accident is a necessary point to consider ahead of an incident. Rescuers can easily make injuries worse if they haven't considered these types of scenarios in advance.

INSURANCE CLAIMS

Doing things the right way can help ensure insurance claims flow smoothly. "All of the yachts tenders, Jet Skis, and other watercraft are covered under the Hull Policy, usually under a separate section and deductible," says E. Maria Karlsson, president/broker Superyacht Insurance Group. "When insuring these, the details of these water tender and toys have to be provided, such as length, engines, age, value, etc."

If a guest or crewmember is injured, after the person is retrieved from the water and immobilized, he or she needs to be transported to the nearest emergency room, whether by ambulance or air evacuation if there's no hospital nearby.

The medical provider will contact the person's medical insurance (which is usually the primary insurance in the case of an injury) and possibly the



A Pro Guarding training session in progress.

vessel's hull insurance. The captain or officer will need to inform the insurer about what happened and where the injured party is getting care, so the insurer can reach out directly to provide a guarantee of payment. It's important to contact the insurance as soon as possible, says Karlsson. "Some insurance plans also require [they] be notified within a certain time frame after being admitted to the hospital or the benefits will be less," she says.

Concurrently, a claim needs to be filed with a medical carrier (in the case of crew) and the yacht's insurance. The captain should also write an accident report, documenting the claim and eventually the treatment received, as well as the recovery progress.

There's no way to guarantee the vessel or owner won't get sued if someone is injured while playing with the yacht's toys – the best bet is to have safety practices in place before someone gets hurt – however, if adequate insurance coverage is in place, the owner's liability is decreased substantially.

"If insurance is lacking or has coverage gaps, then this could open doors for legal actions," says Karlsson. "In times like this, when everybody is suing everybody and lawyers are advertising their services, nobody is protected from being sued and especially wealthy individuals like yacht owners are targeted."

As the old adage goes, proper planning prevents poor performance – it's important for crew to prepare for catastrophe and be ready to respond on the chance that an emergency occurs. D

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