

Laser 4000 fatality

Many of you will have heard about the tragic loss of a Laser 4000 crew in July during the national championships at the South Caernarfonshire Yacht Club. The RYA were asked to investigate the accident, and **John Thorn** outlines his findings and the recommendations that followed.

On Monday July 30, 2007 a competitor from Northern Ireland taking part in the Laser 4000 National Championships died as a result of being unable to free himself from the rigging when the boat capsized and inverted.

The weather on the day was fair with a moderate NW force 3-4.

The helm and crew of the Laser 4000 had known each other for approximately a year but did not usually sail together. However when the helm's usual crew could not make the event, the new pairing teamed up to travel to Abersoch to compete with 38 other boats.

On day two of the event, having just had their best result so far of 34th in the morning race, the crew had just finished the downwind leg on lap one of a three lap race, when they capsized near the committee boat.

They had been having difficulty recovering the spinnaker just prior to this capsize and the crew had gone forward in the boat to sort it out. Whatever had caused the problem with the spinnaker was soon sorted and the crew attempted to return to the cockpit by stepping around the outside of the shrouds, when the boat capsized. The helm immediately climbed up on to the dagger board but soon became aware that there was a problem as the crew called out several times for help.

Uncertain what the problem was, the helm waved to alert the nearby committee boat that help was needed, before climbing off the dagger board and swimming around the boat to try and assist the crew. Unable to release

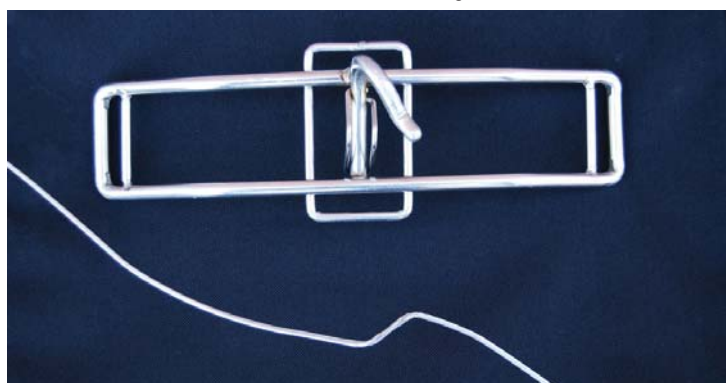


himself, and despite the helm's best efforts to support him in the water, the boat quickly inverted and the crew was dragged under.

Meanwhile the race management team on the committee vessel had seen the helm waving and, realising there was a problem, immediately sent out a VHF call to all safety boats to attend the capsized boat. The safety boats quickly arrived on scene and the helm, with the help of the first safety boat crew, managed to bring the boat back up to a near horizontal position and the crew reappeared. The helm then went over the bow of the dinghy to render assistance and the third safety boat was quickly manoeuvred into a position where the casualty could be reached and pulled out of the water and onboard.

Sadly, despite CPR being performed en route to the beach, and the best efforts of all concerned, the casualty was pronounced dead at the scene.

Subsequent examination of the boat and personal equipment found a 40° bend in the crew's trapeze hook and a matching twist in the port lower shroud. The post mortem examination determined the cause of death as drowning.



Lessons learned and recommendations

- Some dinghies can invert very quickly after an initial capsizes. The speed of inversion reduces the time available to release any crew who might be trapped.
- Dinghy trapeze harness hooks have been involved in several near miss incidents of entrapment and two previous fatalities, one of which also involved a Laser 4000.
- The RYA, manufacturers and class associations should raise awareness of the risks and hazards surrounding capsize and inversion, the use and wearing of dinghy trapeze harnesses, and issues surrounding the risk of entrapment.
- The RYA should determine and recommend an ISO standard or set of requirements for harness equipment in order to assist manufacturers in the design and production of effective, suitable quick release systems for dinghy trapeze harnesses.
- The RYA should highlight the need for organisations and investigating authorities to preserve all evidence on scene, including the vessel connected with an accident, until after an investigation has taken place.

How to become a Coach/ Assessor

If you are interested in the RYA's programme of coach personal development (CPD) and would like to know more about becoming a Coach/Assessor, then please read on...

A Coach/Assessor is, for many people, the pinnacle of their dinghy coaching career. A common scenario is that you may have started as an assistant instructor at your local club or centre, passed your instructor course, instructed for a few seasons or even a gap year. Then came the opportunity to step up and take more responsibility as a Senior Instructor. You enjoy this, but after several years (ideally in a variety of centres or clubs), you may feel ready to take the next step towards sharing your experience and knowledge with others, and help them join in the fun.

The Coach/Assessor course is for experienced Senior Instructors who also hold the Advanced Instructor endorsement. To be eligible for the course selection you should be a thoroughly competent sailor with good communication, motivation and leadership skills, good fleet management and coaching, with a positive, enthusiastic approach.

If you think this description fits you, and we hope it does, contact your Regional Development Officer or RYA Training to discuss your application.

There is usually one Coach/Assessor course each year, preceded by two or three selection weekends, of which you need to attend one.

Don't talk about it, just do it!

New handbooks coming soon

Just a quick note to let you know that the Beginners' Handbook (G3) and the Advanced Handbook (G12) are both undergoing the publishing version of a nip and tuck with a bit of a facelift! The new issues should be available this winter.

The content will remain the same so all existing copies are still good to use and there is no need to replace them. You will simply receive the new versions when existing stocks run out.