

Why Safety First Shouldn't Come Second



When big timber coastal trawlers are pushed around in a bar like this, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to work out this is a 'no-go' zone for recreational fishos. Nevertheless, we will see the usual boating tragedies swirl around the coastline this summer as casual boaties ignore the warnings . . . and make unnecessary mistakes. This heads-up is designed to help make sure none of The Boat Mag's readers get into trouble, and instead, enjoy a safe, happy Summer fishing season.

With Christmas comes summer, with summer comes the holidays, and with the holidays comes boating, fishing and for many families, a rare chance to spend some quality time together.

It's also the time when literally thousands of boating families head down to the water - for the first time in many cases, for months, in a long overdue opportunity to go boating, fishing, skiing, cruising and just splashing around in clear water under sunny skies.

For the vast majority of boatowners, they will have prepared the boat's trailer for the all important highway leg, and similarly, checked out all the safety equipment and gear on the boat that is likely or even unlikely - to be used in the case of emergency.

For this December magazine, we've tended to focus on the safety issue, and whilst much of it is old hat for the experienced hands, there is always things we need to upgrade, learn, check

or qualify about going boating.

It's no different to preparing the fishing gear - just as you wouldn't go away on your fishing holiday with line that is degraded by the sun, rusty hooks and insufficient swivels, the preparation for the boat falls into the same sort of environment.

(Well, alright, I'll concede I've done the odd fishing trip with crappy line, rusty hooks and bugger all swivels because I was so desperate to get away I figured I'd get most of the stuff in situ or along the way . . . busy blokes sometimes don't have a perfect preparation period to get everything spot on, and I hastily acknowledge this point.)

Unfortunately, and taking a more serious view, the boating side of things often falls into the same trap - where we should have more time to get the boat and trailer ready, with the pressure of life today in the cities and in the bush, there is always so many other things that have to be done, isn't there?

All too often the boating and fishing equipment is just about the last thing that gets looked at - and that's just before you take off down the driveway at home.

With this in mind I'd just like to run over a couple of points that everybody knows about, but we all need to think about anew.

They include:

Capsize And Stability

Further on in this issue we have a full report on Pat Jones' Boat Collar which highlights what can be a real problem for a lot of people fishing out of tinnies.

By their very nature, the great Aussie tinny is a fairly unstable little beast, and it doesn't take a heck of a lot to tip it over - and that can be just as simple as taking a leak over the side, a couple of people rushing across to help gaff that big fish, or just carelessness in getting up and stepping across the thwarts. Very rarely do tinnies capsize

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underway, unless the crew is doing something incredibly stupid or the boat is out in sea conditions which it shouldn't be in. Fortunately this is very rare. Tragically, most small boat accidents happen either when the boat is trolling, most commonly at anchor and occasionally because the boat has hit an unknown object such as a big log under the water, a reef, etc.

Both Pat Jones' Boat Collar and Doug Hemingway's Air O Float systems work (by and large) on the same principle of providing additional buoyancy that dramatically increases the boat's stability and its ability to cope with a sudden emergency.

People don't get into trouble in small craft because of something that's happened slowly, carefully and rationally - it is invariably a sudden, instant crisis brought on in milliseconds and catching the crew off guard. That's where these devices can help and we urge readers with tinnies and small craft to redouble their efforts to think about the installation of this ring of safety around their boats, not for what you know about, but for what you don't expect.

Anchoring Techniques

Could I remind readers with small craft about the most dangerous thing you can do in a tinny is anchor by the stern.

I know it's quite common, especially in estuaries where fishos are trying to spread their lines in a strong current, and use the length of the boat and its two or three fishing positions to

maximum affect by anchoring the rig across the stream from the stern and the bow.

Done properly this is an age old technique that has stood the test of time for decades. But what is not commonly realised is that it is absolutely imperative that in such an environment, the stern anchor is recovered before the bow anchor so that no matter where you are or in what current, when the rear anchor is dislodged from the seabed, the boat automatically flicks around to remain securely on the bow anchor.

Needless to say, never, ever, anchor from the stern only, no matter where you are, no matter how flat or calm the conditions might be. The very fact that you as a bloke have to go down to that corner of the boat, the stern, stand there and pull up an anchor is enough to drop that 'corner' under the water lickity-split, and so fast you will not know you've capsized till you discover you're 6' under.

We ran some tests on this a few years ago in Pittwater and it was one of the scariest most alarming boating days I've ever had - you would not believe how easy and how fast a tinny will sink by pulling the anchor up on the corner off the stern.

Just don't do it, okay?

Taking The Piss

Whilst 'taking the piss' out of a politician is fair game, all joking aside, taking the piss over the side of a tinny is just plain stupid.

Over the years heaps of things have

been tried but fair dinkum, nothing is as effective, simple, clean and as safe as a 1200mm piece of 50mm plumber's poly pipe. (*Okay Samson, make that 1200mm x 70mm!*)

Keep a metre or so of the tube in the side locker and when the urge arises you take a leak *from the centre of the boat* because you don't have to go over to the side.

If you want to get really tricky you can angle the tube around towards the stern, preferably not into the wind, angle it down at 16.5 degrees off TDC and precisely 42.54° off the centreline of the boat - and go for it. *Just don't walk over to the side!*

Afterward, it takes seconds to *sit down*, slush the pipe through with the water over the side from a seated position and put the poly pipe back in the side shelf. All done, all safe, all comfortable. Too easy.

Mobile Phones Offshore

No doubt this will be a bit controversial but there is nothing quite as useless as a mobile phone offshore in a distress situation.

Time and time again we've had incidents around our popular waterways where dudes have called up their wife, or dialled the mobiles' emergency number, or triple O, to report that the engine has broken down and they can't get home.

This is just plain bloody stupid. The mobile phone system is not designed for marine emergencies unless all else fails.

It is literally the last resort.

A 27 MHz radio or (preferably) VHF radios today cost bugger all, and it behoves each and every one of us going offshore, to log in via the VHF radio with your local Sea Rescue, AVCG, Marine Rescue, Tournament base (etc), to let a professional operator know of your fishing plans and ETA back at the launchramp.

If you break down, or have some emergency offshore, having a marine frequency radio is a godsend because if nothing else, you could be (especially at night) not 800-900m from assistance from another fishing boat sitting there with their lights out, unaware that you are all drowning!

Your mobile phone call goes back to land, but even if you get on to your wife or best mate, your position (then) has to be relayed AGAIN, and THEY