



Mal de Mer!

Seasickness is something even the hardest mariner can fall foul of. Paul Glatzel finds out the causes and what can be done to prevent it.

Why is that some people can spend hours bobbing around in a boat without a care in the world whilst for others even the sight of an outboard brings them out in a cold sweat and a rapid descent into seasickness?

Contrary to popular opinion any one can succumb to seasickness and even the most experienced boater is likely at some stage to fall foul of this debilitating condition.

So as a Skipper you need to know what to look out for in case you or one of your crew is about to succumb and what to do once they have. Mention seasickness and we all imagine hanging over the side getting a chance to reacquaint yourself with your breakfast, before this occurs though you are likely to feel lethargic and slightly drowsy leading rapidly to a nauseous feeling and a cold sweat. These symptoms get worse and any attempt to focus on close work (reading etc) often worsens the situation. As the nauseous feeling worsens then so the onset of violent vomiting is almost inevitable.

At this stage there is not much that you can do for the victim beyond making sure that they are comfortable and safe. Ensure that another crew member is with them as they lean over the side just to ensure they don't fall overboard, once they have stopped vomiting if there is a place where they can rest then get them there. Bear in mind that they are losing fluids every time they are sick so ensure just as you would when you are ashore that you replace liquids and salts when you can.

Hopefully as an observant Skipper you may have picked up on the signs of the onset of sea sickness before your crew member starts to vomit. If you do then there are few things that you can do which may prevent them vomiting. Firstly, get them into the fresh air (if you have a cabin) and give them the task of steering the vessel. Asking them to steer helps them focus on the horizon and gives them the chance to anticipate the movement of the craft. Alternatively lie them down on the deck and get them to shut their eyes helping to reduce the number of 'inputs' their brain is receiving. If you have suffered from extreme sickness then you'll know that at the time you really will never feel any worse than you do at that moment so ensure they get plenty of sympathy and try to get them ashore as soon as possible. In serious situations don't hesitate to contact the Coastguard as talking to them will ensure that you are doing the right things for your casualty.

SO WHAT CAUSES SEASICKNESS OR 'MAL DE MER'?

In fact seasickness is motion sickness and arises from the brain's attempt to take in all the varied data that it is being fed from the various sensors around our body.

On one level the inner ears are feeding data about balance and the position of the body, our eyes feed in data giving the brain

an idea of where the body is relative to its surroundings whilst pressure sensors pick up on the forces acting on our feet and other parts of our body due to gravity. Finally, our muscles send data about what they are doing and whether they are working, are stationary and what directions they are moving in.

It is hardly surprising then that our brain ends up being overloaded by these conflicting messages as much of the data arriving seems to contradict other elements of it. For example, as you focus on some close work – a chartplotter or a chart – then the page or screen is not moving yet your other sensors are telling your brain that you are bouncing around all over the place – I'm feeling queasy just explaining this!

So what can you do to prevent seasickness? Stay off big, rich breakfasts prior to making a passage is rule one! Acidic foods, even some fruits can be problematic too. Bread is always good at calming the tum and you can't go wrong with cool fresh water either. So plain food and drink both before a passage and during is sensible. Champagne is supposed to be good – if you can afford it! But seriously, try fizzy water, as it's often the gas that can help.

Like any ailment there seem to be a mixture of remedies from the medicinal through to 'old wives tales'. If you or your crew are likely to succumb to seasickness then it would be best to take seasickness tablets before you go afloat, some swear by wristbands whilst for others ginger capsules is where it's at!. Whatever works for you just make sure that



you apply the remedy early as once you have your head over the side it's far too late!

Don't overlook mental attitude too. As some people can become seasick even just looking at a moored boat this rather implies that mental attitude plays a part. So if you approach your boating feeling that you are likely to get sick then you are far more likely to do so. Think positive and concentrate your mind on something else. Get talking and getting your mind active. Sea sickness will cause people to go into decline to the point they can become so lethargic that even in dangerous conditions they may simply 'switch off'. Remember at all times that you are dealing with a mental problem, at its source – so the sufferer needs to fight this element besides

purely dealing with the physical. Retching endlessly will cause a person to sweat and not only loose body fluid but also cause them to become cold as the body cools and clothing next to the skin gets damp. So watch out that your sufferer does not place himself or herself in danger of succumbing to hypothermia. Avoid getting overhot as this will assist the onset of sickness. Therefore, getting your clothing right prior to departure is essential and with the forms of modern clothing now available, this should be achievable. Tight neck seals aren't helpful so it may be wise to get your upper body out of the suit and in the fresh air.

In summary, as a skipper try to prevent seasickness by ensuring crew take medication, keep a look out for the symptoms and if you

spot them then take proactive action to try and prevent the situation worsening. Ensure you have plenty of water on board and rehydration sachets to replace lost salts. Once you have an ill passenger then amend your passage to get them ashore as soon as possible and ensure they are well looked after, after all next time – it could be you!

Paul Glatzel is a RYA Powerboat Trainer and Examiner. He runs Powerboat Training UK in Poole/Lymington and is author of the RYA Powerboat Handbook. www.powerboattraininguk.co.uk

Rib-X

**Luxury, Leisure,
Commercial, Dive and
Race RIBs from 4.5 - 8.5m**

T: 0116 277 7373 (Office)
T: 01858 880 440 (Factory)
T: 077 39 80 90 60 (Mobile)



**TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN
IN PARTNERSHIP**

·QUALITY·DURABILITY·PERFORMANCE·

SOLENT RIBS

**SOLENT
RIBS**

RIBS FROM:
5.4m - 7.5m Outboards or Inboards
For full details visit: www.solentribs.com

SOLENT RIBS
43 Old Gosport Road, Fareham,
Hants PO16 0XH
T: (+44) 01329 823927

