

DART TALES


 Lifeboats

NEWS FROM THE RNLI LIFEBOAT TEAM IN DARTMOUTH

RNLI DART NOW OPERATES WITH AN ADDITIONAL ATLANTIC 85 INSHORE LIFEBOAT

The two year trial to assess the suitability of placing an RNLI B class inshore lifeboat in Dartmouth has been completed. The trial commenced with Salcombe's ex Atlantic 75 lifeboat on 9 September 2018, to work alongside our D class lifeboat. In particular the Operational Director of the RNLI wished to be very clear about the frequency and type of tasking requests that are placed on the D class lifeboat that are near the limit of the guidelines for its use and capability, including crew safety factors.

On 7 July Mark Strudwick, Lifeboat Operations Manager for the RNLI Dart lifeboat Station, was told that the Trustees of the institution had approved the Operations Committee's recommendation for the permanent allocation of a B class lifeboat to the Dart Lifeboat Station. It was proven that the desired effect on lifesaving capability had been met, which resulted in an earlier than expected approval.

During the trial the Atlantic 75 was launched at the request of the Coastguard, 50 times, saved two lives and assisted 97 people. She was also launched 114 times on exercise, which highlighted the exceptional commitment of the Dart volunteers. During the same period the D class lifeboat was



B-825 being craned into the harbour.

Photograph by Andy Kyle

launched 30 times, saved one life and aided 44 people.

The Aquadock used for the trial boat, originally for the Loch Ness B class, was modified on the

“She is the right asset for the right job”

river to take the larger Atlantic 85 inshore lifeboat. Throughout July and August the volunteer crew, helms and RNLI trainers entered an intensive period of training to familiarise themselves with the enhanced assets and capabilities of the new boat that was coming.

The Atlantic 85 lifeboat B-825 Norma Ethel Vinall from the relief

fleet at Poole was brought to Dartmouth on 18 August for the further training of the Operations team. She was craned into the water from the South Embankment watched by a sizable crowd. Further photographs can be found in the Picture gallery on the station web site www.rnlidart.org.uk Until the Atlantic 85 became operational, the Atlantic 75 remained on station as an operational lifeboat.

Having learnt to handle the Atlantic 75 over the last two years the helms needed to modify their boat handling skills as the two boats handle very differently, especially at high speeds. The lifeboat crew had to be trained in the use of the radar and the direction finding VHF radio, neither of which are on the Atlantic 75. Fortunately the advanced electronics package, including the navigation system, is the same on the two boats and is also used

Photo by Stuart Millard/RNLI crew



on the Tamar and Shannon all-weather-lifeboats.

The 21 RNLI Dart lifeboat crew had to be trained and become familiar with the new boat's layout and where every piece of equipment was stored. They had to be able

to access all the rescue equipment carried, even when the boat will be operating in rough seas and in total darkness. Another common factor was the water filled ballast tank in the bows to prevent the

craft flipping over onto her back when she reached rough water. RNLI Dart has permission from the Harbour Master to travel above the water speed limit in the harbour in order to fill the tanks and this may occur as she leaves the harbour. The tank then has to be emptied before she can be re-berthed on the Aquadock.

On 28 August, on what would have been Regatta Friday in any normal year, HM Coastguard recognised B-825 as an operational Search and Rescue asset. Dartmouth now has two lifeboats

based on the RNLI Dart lifeboat station; the Atlantic 85 Norma Ethel Vinall kept on the enlarged Aquadock on the river and D838, Dudley Jane, housed within the lifeboat station.

Mark Strudwick, Dart Lifeboat



Photo by John Fenton

Operations manager, was keen to highlight that the new boat not only brings increased capability to deal with the situations she is tasked to in Start Bay and for 10 miles upstream on the river Dart, but also is safer for the four crew who are now seated and strapped into a self-righting lifeboat.

Kevin Murphy, helm on both the boats, described having the Atlantic 85 as "Moving us up a league." Not only does a helm have to deal with increased windage on the boat and power from the two 115hp 4 stroke engines, but

also has to keep command of all the tasks such as navigation, radar, VHF direction finding and communication being carried out by the crew.

THE ENHANCED CAPABILITIES OF THE ATLANTIC 85

Engines. The two 115hp four stroke Yamaha engines can enable her to travel for 2.5 hours at full speed of 35knots. There is a start button for each engine and the choke is automatic. She runs on unleaded petrol straight from the pump. A button operated by the helm controls their trim. Unless it is a flat calm it is usual to throttle back at sea and continue at 30knots which still makes the 85 the fastest lifeboat class in the RNLI fleet, except for the even faster E boats on the Thames. There are no restrictions on how far out to sea she can go. The engines can be re-started electrically even after a total capsized.

Crew numbers. Four is the official maximum crew number. She can launch with three. Other emergency personnel eg a Paramedic, can be carried in the 4th seat.

Weather conditions. The 85 can go to sea in a Force 4, 5 or 6, depending on the wind direction. "She is the right asset for the right job" "The smaller Atlantic 75 is a D class with seats. The 85 is an all-weather-lifeboat with no lid" said Rich Eggleton, Dart lifeboat Training Co-ordinator.

Within the first two weeks of becoming operational the Coastguard called out the Atlantic 85 six times and the D class once. The first, a rescue of a single handed yachtsman and his dog, was the day before she became operational but the volunteers happened to be training with the right boat in the right place.