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DART D'TALES

Lifeboats

NEWS FROM THE RNLI LIFEBOAT TEAM IN DARTMOUTH

Following on from last month, we are carrying on with the theme of the new RNLI lifeboat in Dartmouth, the B-825, as there are loads of new features worth mentioning. Firstly, let's look at the electronics. The Atlantic 85 is packed with modern, useful, gadgets. The first gadget is called a ***VHF direction finder***. This means that the RNLI crew can call up the stricken vessel and ask them to transmit on VHF. This frequency is picked up by the lifeboat and displays a bearing to the casualty vessel. Let's imagine a yacht race and all the sails are white. One vessel becomes a casualty and requests assistance from the RNLI. As all the vessels look alike it is very difficult to locate the stricken vessel. The direction finder sends the RNLI straight to it, thus saving precious time and effort on the part of the rescuing lifeboat. The system will also give a bearing to a transmitting EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon), and search and rescue transponders on larger vessels and many smaller leisure craft are seen on the radar screen.

"We can see a lot more and find a lot more" says Dart RNLI Helm Rich Eggleton.

The VHF follows all marine radio channels. All radio messages are recorded and can be played back, for example when the crew are otherwise occupied and miss the message received.

Next we have ***SIMS***. This is a System Management Information System. It is an electronic integrated bridge system that allows the crew to monitor, operate and control many of the lifeboat's functions directly from their shock-absorbing seats. These functions include: the navigation of the lifeboat, including direction finding, radar and charting; radio communications and CCTV; and the mechanics of the lifeboat including the engines and electrics. In addition to improving crew safety, SIMS allows better task sharing among the crew and negates the need for lots of separate systems and equipment, saving space and reducing weight.

"We can see a lot more and find a lot more"

The Atlantic 85 also comes with ***AIS*** (automatic identification system). This means anyone can search for and find the exact location of the lifeboat at any time when she is afloat and the engines are running.

Finally, whilst The D class lifeboat has one ***solid state computer*** on board, the 85 has two. The crew sitting beside each other behind the helm each have access to an independent screen which can display the navigational charts, radar or VHF radio direction finding displays. The Coastguard is aware of what system is on board and can send the appropriate information to set up search patterns.

What about comfort? Well, the crew are in luck with the new vessel. She comes with air cushioned seats and toe retainers. All four crew are now able to sit down and be strapped in. Interestingly it is the 4th crew member nearest the stern who

wears the kill cord, as they would not be seen by the forward-facing crew if they went overboard. The crew all have waterproof headsets with two earpieces and a microphone boom to allow easier and clearer communication between them.

If the worst were to happen and the lifeboat capsized the crew are in luck. The Atlantic 85 has been designed to self-right. The helm would firstly check that all crew are present under the upturned hull. They would then collect the emergency flares from the bow space and release the sea anchor at the same time. (The sea-anchor, once deployed, is designed to slow the movement of the vessel). The crew will then emerge one at a time and are attached on lines behind the boat. The helm will then pull the release toggle to inflate the righting bag which is carried on the frame above the stern. The crew then climb back using the step on the engines. Once everyone is back on board the helm will decide whether to proceed or return to station depending on the sea conditions, the state of the crew and the reason for the call out.

So next time you see the boat going out on either training or a shout, you will hopefully have a greater appreciation of what everyone is up to on the boat, although they will be holding on tight as they speed off to their casualty.

So – how do you get to be a helm on one of our Lifeboats? Well – the starting point is to do a Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Powerboat course. Dartmouth Yacht Club is a RYA Centre and runs courses for its members. The course is theory and practical based, with lots of hands on lessons to teach you how to drive a boat slowly and at speed safely, come along side and leave the jetty, anchor, man over board, holding off at a buoy and confined turns. In addition, the course is tailored to the local laws that Dart Harbour authorities want you to follow. Once you have done this, and spent some time on the river, you could sign up as crew at Dart RNLI. A great first step.

News, details of launches, photographs and videos can be found on the Dart station website. www.dartlifeboat.org.uk or the station Facebook page www.facebook.com/dartrnlilifeboat