



# Close ENCOUNTERS

HMS investigates the ever-present threat of collision with foreign objects at sea. A danger particularly associated with boating in the autumn and winter, the three accounts featured involve not only our own UK waters but also those of the Mediterranean and even the Southern Ocean.

## The road to Mandelieu

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Glenn Zelen. I work as Product and Marketing Manager at Sea Ray International, and the story I wish to share with you, I hope, will serve as a useful reminder of the need to be extra vigilant at this

time of year while out on the water.

The 2020 Genoa Boat Show was a wet and windy affair and not at all what many of us would associate with this sun-blessed region of the Mediterranean coast. The show is an important one for Sea Ray as its location is at the heart of Europe's

blue-water cruising culture. It also attracts a wide audience of boating enthusiasts from all over Europe, and being a well-established and highly respected event, even amid the complications wrought by COVID this year, it once again delivered a good number of leads and sales for

our company.

The logistics of exhibiting at shows like Genoa are, as you can imagine, quite involved. Nevertheless, in the case of the Genoa Boat Show, the show's coastal location means that transporting the boats from Sea



Photo: Glenn Zelen at the helm of the Sea Ray SLX-R 350

Ray's Mandelieu base in Cannes to Genoa is more easily undertaken by sea, as opposed to trailering them by road. It's also less expensive, and, let's face it, who wouldn't wish to make the 126-mile journey by sea, along some of the most beautiful and dramatic coastline in Europe?

The latest Sea Ray SLX-R 350 model powered by twin 450hp Mercury outboards was in my particular charge. A real 'powerboat' in the fullest sense of the term, she's a beautiful example of a leisure craft that's designed to fulfil the needs of both those who

require comfortable overnight accommodation and those wanting the thrill of driving a very capable offshore-styled sports craft, dripping in American DNA! I could be accused, of course, of being biased, but she's a beauty and more than capable of making this two-way voyage.

Having completed the boat show successfully, it was then time to prepare for the return passage back to Mandelieu in Cannes. The course would take us via Monte Carlo and other great locations along the coast. However, our plans were initially scuppered by a

Sea Rays on passage



forecast predicting 25 knots of wind accompanied by a serious swell from the south-west. This meant that if we were to throw caution to the wind and commit to casting off, we would be beating into some pretty heavy weather. But bearing in mind these were new craft in our care, we had no desire to give them a thrashing! Forty-eight hours later the wind had dropped to a benign 5 knots, so the decision was made to strike out on our westerly course without delay before the window of opportunity closed.

Following a hearty breakfast, we cast off at 8:30am and slipped quietly out of the port, to be greeted by a long, lazy swell and smooth seas. Trimming her nose down just a little, the boat felt reassuringly planted, soon settling into a comfortable cruising pace of 24 knots.

The light was behind us, so a clear view of the water's surface, as blue as the sky above, was duly afforded us. But having crossed the Bay of Genoa and having then rounded the first headland, we began to encounter what was to dog much of our journey back to Cannes, for

**... instead of 'avenues' of debris, we found ourselves surrounded by an entire mass of tide-gathered driftwood flotsam.**

stretching out before us as far as the eye could see was what appeared to be an endless line of driftwood and flotsam lying directly on our course. We were running about a mile offshore, and I estimated that mysterious 'river' of hazardous driftwood to be about 100ft or so in width. Then, interspersed at various intervals, we found virtual 'islands' of driftwood! It was if an entire forest had been carried out to sea and was making its way along the coast upon some great invisible conveyor belt!

It took some negotiating, and even when we thought we were clear of this line of dreaded flotsam, we were never completely free of its presence, as the odd 'growler' would suddenly and unexpectedly appear right in front of our bows. The higher the sun



First sighting off the Italian coast.

Striking foreign objects at sea can cause serious damage to a fast planing hull



**Weather-related incidents have now led to at least two containers being lost overboard around the UK coastline in recent weeks.**

rose, the harder its light refraction made the business of sighting the wood as it lay half-submerged below the water's surface.

We decided to take a break from the demanding business of navigating these waters and so put in to refuel within the illustrious surroundings of Monaco. Strange to think that 150 years ago, this had been, like so many such places along this particular stretch of coast, a simple little fishing harbour ...

The business of some sightseeing was of course inevitable. After all, it would have been a missed opportunity not to have made the



most of our short stay in this world-renowned royal principality – the playground of kings and movie stars.

The friendly marina fuel manager was interested in hearing our story of the log trail and explained that, due to the heavy rains experienced the week before, the region's rivers had flooded their banks and driven much debris down their systems and on out to sea. He was keen to add, however, that the Monaco harbour authorities had closed the marina courtesy of the floating barrier, which

prevented the driftwood becoming a problem to the vessels within. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that it had proved quite hard for shipping in recent days.

Sadly, we had to get underway once more, and so we pulled ourselves away from these famous surroundings, while feeling privileged that our voyage had allowed us the opportunity to experience, albeit too briefly, this iconic location. (For your interest, the cost of fuel at the dockside pump here in this

millionaire's playground equated to 1.64 euros a litre.)

Around the point of Antibes, we once again encountered problems, but this time, instead of 'avenues' of debris, we found ourselves surrounded by an entire mass of tide-gathered driftwood flotsam. There appeared to be no way out, so all we could do was to edge our way forward at idle speed while nudging the larger pieces away with our boat hooks in an effort to keep the props unharmed.

Finally, after a long and at times challenging day at sea, we arrived back unharmed, damage free, in the familiar surroundings of Mandelieu, Cannes. The boat had done us proud.



**SEA RAY SLX 350 FEATURES**

The boat featured in this account is the limited-edition model of Sea Ray's SLX 350 Outboard. Its hull design has been matched to the attributes of Mercury's high-performance outboard technology and comes with premium finishes along with cutting-edge information display systems designed to enhance the driver's boating experience. The SLX also includes a NAUTIC-ON smart boating system and a one-year complimentary Sea Ray Connect app subscription. Other standard cockpit features include a Fusion Apollo 770 12V AM/FM sound system with Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay and digital signal processing. The boat comes rigged with twin Mercury Racing 450R 4.6L V8 outboards in Cold Fusion White livery and is supplied with Joystick Piloting (2 x 450hp - 335kW).

**Are you ready?** Imagine how fast your boat might sink if your hull was damaged from an impact? A simple liferaft and grab bag, with an EPIRB/PLB/Flares/VHF could save your life. We found these available from [force4.co.uk](http://force4.co.uk)



+ More Options

**SEAGO**  
Sea Cruiser ISO9650-2 Liferaft - Canister  
Catalogue Code: 510095  
**From £759.00**  
✓ Available to buy online

**PAINS WESSEX**  
SOS Grab Bag  
Catalogue Code: 500001  
**£23.95**  
✓ Available to buy online

**SPECIFICATIONS**

**LOA** (inc. outboard engines): 11.25m  
**BOA:** 3.2m  
**Dry weight:** 5.470kg  
**Hull deadrise:** 21°

One last observation you may be interested in, and I confess this surprised me, is that among all the driftwood debris we encountered, we never came across a single item of plastic!

In summary, I would recommend that drivers of motorboats in particular need to be extra vigilant during the autumn and winter months. All manner of flotsam and jetsam can be washed down our rivers out to sea during the storm season. In a way, it was a safer scenario for us, because the debris was congregating and amassing on the tide. Of course, what are much more dangerous are the 'lone wolves' or 'growlers' that lurk semi-awash, isolated from the rest of 'the pack'. These are the greatest hazard to a fast-moving vessel as they can not only severely damage a GRP hull but also smash a propeller or even destroy a leg and gear casing.



Drive with due care and attention is my advice, and keep an extra lookout. If you do, you will likely be absolutely fine. A case of forewarned is forearmed. But if you do encounter this hazard, and if it is significant enough, then remember to report its position to the coastguard (in the case of the UK, this would be the MCA). If they deem it necessary, the coastguard authorities can then broadcast its position via a 'Securiti' announcement to all shipping. □

## But now to the next account involving waters closer to home and the work of the MCA ...



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## Containers overboard

Weather-related incidents have now led to at least two containers being lost overboard around the UK coastline in recent weeks. As well as a substantial quantity lost in the Bristol Channel, at the time of writing, 33 shipping containers were also adrift in the Pentland Firth off the Scottish coast after being lost from a container ship. Two of these 40ft containers were reported as being washed up ashore in South Hoy, Orkney.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's Counter Pollution Team requested overflights of the areas where containers were still adrift, to assist in tracking and also to search for any that may have come ashore. Local shipping warnings continue to be issued by HM Coastguard to advise other vessel traffic in the areas affected. Members of the public were also urged to keep well clear of containers washed up ashore for their own safety. The emergency towing vessel (ETV) *Ievoli Black* acted as a guard vessel in the Pentland Firth, and the Northern Lighthouse Board also assisted with the search. A coastguard aircraft conducted overflights of the area.

The VMS Shipping Group from Werkendam, which

manages the ship, said that 32 of the containers were empty.

'The containers were loaded with consumer goods,' Director Erik van der Wiel explained. 'We don't know exactly what's in there yet. In any case, let's hope it's not something that creates an environmental risk ... But a storm caused high waves. As a result, water was probably flushed over the deck and the containers were knocked overboard. Fortunately, the crew was unharmed and the ship itself was not badly damaged.'

Investigations will take place into how the load came loose, but according to Van der Wiel, it cannot be because of the way in which the containers are attached to the ship: 'Everything is well established, and we have worked completely according to the rules.' Nevertheless, this further emphasises the need for all mariners, including owners of leisure craft, to be particularly diligent during the autumn and winter months as all manner of debris can be present in the water. Such incidents highlight the need to be extra vigilant and aware of potential collision dangers, especially when helming high-speed craft.



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But other than a good lookout and a watchful eye, is there any technology out there that can come to the rescue in helping to identify dangerous, semi-submerged floating objects? Allow Oscar to explain ...

# Eye in the sky

**You Tube video link for Oscar device** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkgY74BCiqw>

Over the last eight editions of the Vendée Globe, only 53% of the entries completed the course. The other 47% were forced to retire with gear failure or personal injury, but often due also to a collision causing irreparable damage. This year, however, the risk of collision is anticipated to be significantly reduced, for the reason that many of the competing IMOCA's have been fitted with a new electronic safety aid called 'Oscar'. Made by BSB Marine, Oscar uses day and thermal cameras combined with artificial intelligence to alert the helm to dangerous objects in the water. The system works in addition to/complements radar and provides a second set of 'eyes' for the skipper both during the day and, crucially, at night.

BSB's aim is to prevent a collision with any of the many potential threats a vessel can encounter at sea, be they other vessels, unidentified floating objects such as logs, buoys or containers, or sleeping sea mammals. In practice, Oscar instantly alerts the skipper of any potential danger and indicates the position of that threat on a dedicated map. The skipper can view and

record the images transmitted from Oscar's cameras. The system is said to improve with every mile sailed, as it learns from its experiences and then feeds on this data to 'self-improve'.

At present, the camera has to be mounted at a height of 8 metres above sea level, and so while being well suited to sailing yachts, it is not yet practical for most motor vessels. Nevertheless, its makers told PBR that trials begin this January on producing a system that it is hoped will see the technology being modified and adapted to work at much lower mounting heights.

At present, these BSB systems start at around 11K, but as with many technologies, not only do their makers continue to develop them for an increasing variety of applications, but also the cost begins to decrease as the product becomes more widely taken up. In line with this, BSB inform us that they are cognisant of the motorboat market, they understand its needs and are committed to seeking solutions for our sector too. [www.oscar-system.com](http://www.oscar-system.com)

**... Oscar uses day and thermal cameras combined with artificial intelligence to alert the helm to dangerous objects in the water.**



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## Avoid at all cost!



Royal Navy bomb disposal experts recently detonated a wartime mine trawled up in the Firth of Clyde. This comes after the Troon RNLI was tasked with assisting the 68m Marine Scotland survey vessel that discovered it. After a rendezvous with the vessel to the north east of the Isle of Arran, seven non-essential personnel were transferred to the lifeboat. With the transfer complete, the lifeboat returned to Troon and the vessel continued on its passage while being monitored by Belfast Coastguard. The Royal Navy's Northern Diving Group met the survey vessel at Ettrick Bay on the Isle of Bute. The divers declared the mine, which still contained around 350kg of explosives, to be in pristine condition and decided a controlled detonation at sea was the best solution. It was lowered to the seabed before a controlled explosion took place. It's believed the mine was laid by a German submarine off the island of Ailsa Craig.

"Considering it had been in the water for around 80 years, the mine's condition was remarkable," says Mark Shaw, commanding officer of Northern Diving Group. "From the initial pictures we were able to easily identify the mine type and, importantly, determine that the explosive fill was intact and therefore presented a significant hazard. "Items of this size are relatively uncommon, however, the group are approaching 100 call-outs this year supporting civil authorities with all types of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), ranging from mines and torpedoes to hand grenades and improvised devices. "On average, across the UK, Royal Navy Clearance Divers are tasked once a day for EOD assistance. This highlights the remaining presence of historic ordnance. Even small items can be unstable and present an explosive hazard; carrying-out a controlled explosion is the only safe way of dealing with them and neutralising the hazard." ■