



January, 2016

Dear Newport Bermuda Race Competitor,

Congratulations on being accepted into the fleet of the 2016 Newport Bermuda Race. You will likely be preparing your boat and crew from now right up until race day. However, do not let your planning and preparation end on arrival in Bermuda. Please keep uppermost in mind that preparing for the safety of your crew and vessel for the return trip is just as important as it is for the race itself, if not more so. As the return trip is not organized by any particular group, you and your crew are far more 'on your own' than during the race; also, they will not have the safety net of the more than 100 accompanying vessels available in the race. Therefore, the CCA Safety at Sea Committee urges you to have the very highest standards of safety for your return-trip crew following the race. You should put as much thought into crew selection and crew and boat preparation for your boat's return as has been put into the race.

Experience has shown that the return trip can be fraught with trouble. Every year we see a number of safety-related incidents occur on the return trip. Consider the following return trip incidents:

- In 2014, a returning boat headed for Connecticut was towed in by the USCG
- In 2012, a returning NBR vessel was abandoned 230 miles Northwest of Bermuda when its rudder failed. The skipper's decision to leave the boat was heavily influenced by his badly seasick crew.
- During the same passage three other crewmembers were evacuated from their vessels (by a cruise ship) due to life threatening injuries. Two other boats suffered knockdowns and gear failures which left them "limping" home at reduced capacity.
- The return passage in 2010 saw one crewmember airlifted (with face injuries) and another treated for broken ribs and confined to his bunk.
- In 2008, three returning crewmembers (two with head injuries and one with dehydration and shock) were evacuated from different boats (two by a cruise ship, one by USCG helicopter).

We see more safety-related incidents on the return trip from Bermuda after the race for a number of reasons. For one, the intense focus of the race immediately disappears as you make your way past St. David's Lighthouse and into Hamilton Harbor after the finish. Often, the highly sought out, trained and experienced crewmembers are sent home by plane and they are replaced by fewer and less-trained and less-experienced crew for the return. And, work and racing schedules do not always allow returning skippers to wait for an optimal weather window to head back to the mainland. However, Bermuda now allows you to keep your boat in Bermuda for up to six months. This can give you some flexibility in timing your departure from Bermuda. Lastly, gear that was worked hard during the race is not always adequately inspected and repaired prior to the return.

The CCA Safety at Sea Committee has put together a resource library of helpful information for returning boats on the CCA website at <https://www.cruisingclub.org/safety/nbreturn>. We offer this as a tool for your return preparation. You will find a range of articles and checklists that might be helpful to you and your return crew as you and they plan the return passage. There is advice on seasickness medications and the importance of giving them a “test run” before you leave the dock. There are tips on choosing the right lifesaving gear and write-ups of the official investigations of recent yachting tragedies from which we all can learn.


We urge you to encourage returning crews to obtain safety training, such as at the CCA’s Safety at Sea Seminar in March in Newport, and to include them in on-the-water safety training aboard your boat, such as MOB recovery and storm tactics. Over the years there have been incidents on the return trip, but because the crew had been to a Safety at Sea seminar, had participated in on-the-boat training and were aboard well-prepared boats, the boats did limp home, but there were no injuries or loss of the boat. Such safety training and boat preparation are just as important to returning crewmembers as they are to the racers. After all, it is the same body of water and the risks are the same – or greater. Things happen. It is how well prepared the crew and boat are that determines the outcome. Let’s do everything we can to make sure the returning crews are just as prepared as those racing down. Return crews are great candidates as future race crews; so, investment in their training is also an investment in the future.

There are many ways to show a return track to your friends and family. We've found the simplest to be satellite-based. Popular and reliable trackers include YB (formerly YellowBrick) trackers, SPOT Trace and DeLorme InReach. Regardless of the tracker you pick, please let your loved ones know that the loss of a tracker signal does not mean your boat is lost, only that the tracker has run down, and not to trigger an emergency response unless asked to.

We are also looking into options for shipping boats back from Bermuda.

We wish you a safe race – and return.

Sincerely,



Ernie Godshalk, Chairman
Cruising Club of America Safety at Sea Committee