

# French yachtsman was a true pioneer

LAST week one of the world's greatest and most respected yachtsmen was reported missing at sea.

He was the 66-year-old Eric Tabarly who fell overboard at night about four miles south west of the Welsh coast. Tabarly was cruising aboard his yacht *Pen Duick* with four inexperienced crew members. Sailing conditions were good, with a 20 knot south-westerly blowing in a rough sea with a two metre swell.

The mariner fell into the sea during a sail change; he was not wearing a lifejacket. Eric Tabarly embodies the myth of the mariner and is a personality of reference for sailors the world over.

He was also one of France's most famous sportsmen. The ideas and innovations of this ex-navy officer have led to considerable improvements of the safety and perfor-



mance of sailing boats. He is notably the inventor of the water ballast system which is common today on modern racing yachts, especially those of single-handers. Tabarly was also one of the pioneers of multi-hulls, being particularly famous for the trimaran *Pen Duick 4*.

But it was aboard the foiler trimaran *Paul Ricard* that in 1980 he broke the mythical Atlantic crossing record in 10 days, five hours and one minute, a record that had stood since 1905.

His loss has come as a shock to the sailing fraternity, and shows just how vulnerable everyone is

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On discussing Tabarly's loss with a delivery skipper, he mentioned that he never wore a safety harness as he preferred to work quickly and unhindered when on deck, irrespective of the weather.

While skippers can insist on crew wearing safety harnesses, they cannot always ensure that the crew are clipped on, as this, to a large extent, is a personal decision.

But the loss of a person overboard puts the lives of the crew of the vessel, plus those involved in any search and rescue attempt, in jeopardy.

At sea the attitude that "it can't happen to me" is unseamanlike and highly irresponsible.

The sailing fraternity will miss Tabarly.

RICHARD CROCKETT