

RESCUED OFF EAST LONDON

Expect the Unexpected

By Matthew Thomas



Jean Sitruk and Kyle Castelyn celebrate being rescued.

pic by NSRI



It's a long way down! Traversing the rope ladder on their way to terra firma in Cape Town. The NSRI effected this transfer.

pic by NSRI

For anyone considering an ocean voyage, a liferaft and an EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon) are essential gear. Of course, we always hope we'll never have to use them and most of us have a basic idea of how to deploy them, but what happens when the unexpected happens in really bad weather? What will you do?

With more and more people cruising, and the move towards catamarans as the preferred way to cruise, it's important to learn lessons from each incident. For sailors on catamarans, one of the questions that has been raised in the past is questioning whether to stay with the boat, which won't sink, or to take to the liferaft, and what to do with the yacht's tenders.

For the two sailors onboard the Switch 51 catamaran, *Lama Lo*, while on passage to Cape Town, fate dealt them a blow that would result in them spending 25 hours adrift about 50nm off East London. After a search involving numerous ships, the NSRI and a SAAF Oryx helicopter, they were rescued by a very large, French container ship.

Lama Lo was built by Sud Composites in France and has been the home of retired Parisian surgeon, Jean Sitruk (65) for the last eight years. Built out of composites, this yacht was designed by the best of the best, Marc van Peteghem and Laurent Prevost, designers of some of the most notable globe circling yachts. *Lama Lo* was fast, well built and well found, having completed

numerous Atlantic Crossings, plus extensive sailing in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

For this part of the journey, Kyle Castelyn (20), a young sailor from Strand had joined Jean, and as part of their trip south, the pair had decided to stop in Port Elizabeth before continuing to Cape Town, and it was while sailing in heavy weather off East London that the unthinkable happened.

Kyle was on watch and *Lama Lo* was comfortably sailing at 10 to 12 knots in about 25/30 knots of wind in big lumpy swells. Jean was asleep in his cabin in the starboard hull and Kyle had just taken a look around outside to check on everything, when all of a sudden there was a tremendous crash and the boat staggered and slewed to port.

Immediately, Jean was out of his bunk and on deck with Kyle to see what had happened. The rig was still up and as they looked around, they saw a large whale alongside the yacht. Kyle went down to the port hull and stepped into rapidly rising water.

Clearly the boat had been holed and immediately they started to gather things together in case they needed to leave the boat in a hurry. Kyle grabbed important gear, the grab bag, the EPIRB, as well as food and water which he sealed in a waterproof bag while Jean got the liferaft ready and cut the lines securing the yacht's inflatable dinghies as well as broadcasting a MAYDAY on the VHF.

Another check of the port hull and it was clear that it was filling up quickly. They deployed the liferaft as a precaution and tied it to the lifelines and when they realised that the boat was starting to capsize onto them, boarded one of the inflatable tenders and cast off, with the intention of returning to the upturned boat once it had capsized, where they would have protection and the added safety of the liferaft.

With winds now gusting above 30 knots and in 5 to 6m swells, they quickly drifted away from

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ABOVE: GC32 sailing in Dubai featuring Southern Spars high performance spars. Photo by Christophe Languay

the yacht and set about activating the EPIRB and trying to start the dinghy's outboard motor so they could return to the yacht. Unable to get the motor started, they tried paddling, but simply couldn't make any headway against the seas or the wind. The time was now 18h00 on Saturday 17 October 2015 - and they'd been sailing happily a few minutes earlier.

Now alone in the vast ocean, they paddled all night to keep the inflatable into the waves as well as to keep warm. With the EPIRB flashing its strobe constantly, they hoped they would be rescued soon.

Back in Cape Town, MRCC (Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre) Cape Town were notified of the EPIRB activation and immediately started to follow the globally established protocols. Plot the co-ordinates of the beacon, issue Nav Warnings to all ships in the area. Check the AIS tracking systems to check what ships were where and start contacting them to assist with the search, phone the EPIRB contact person to check any additional information they could, etc.

Throughout the night, Jean and Kyle paddled, keeping the dinghy into the waves and scanning the horizon to see if anyone was coming. At one point during the night, they did see searchlights in the distance and launched a flare hoping they'd be spotted, but after a while the ships continued on their way.

With morning dawning, a huge wave bore down on them and capsized their rubber duck. Now tired and wet, they climbed onto the upturned hull and simply hung on, letting the sun dry them a little and trying to get some rest, all the while planning to re-right the inflatable as soon as they were rested.

The East London coast is well known for big waves and poor weather and while hanging on to the upturned inflatable, Mother Nature unleashed a second wave, which flipped the boat over again and they scrambled back onboard the now righted rubber duck and continued to paddle to keep the themselves pointed into the waves.

During the day, they observed ships steaming past, but all were too far away and it was at last light on Sunday, at 18h25 that they noticed a ship bearing down on them and sounding its horn. Finally they were being rescued!

What they didn't know was that the upturned hull of *Lama Lo* had been found, as well as the inflated liferaft, which had somehow become detached from the yacht and was

floating free. With no visible survivors, the Captain of the *CMA CGM Rossini* had decided to steam between the upturned hull and the liferaft in the fading light to check if perhaps there were survivors in the water that were still hanging on to the EPIRB that was still sending it's distress call.

Now, 25 hours after hitting the whale, Jean and Kyle were being hoisted aboard the 227m *CMA CGM Rossini* and offered showers, food and dry clothes. NSRI East London had dispatched their rescue vessel and met the *CMA CGM Rossini* far out to sea, where they transferred their medic onboard who checked out both survivors.

Chatting with them both after they arrived safely in Cape Town it was clear they were relieved to be safe and were clearly touched by the generosity of the crew of the *CMA CGM Rossini* who had freely given them clothes and the ship's Captain who had manoeuvred his 227m vessel in the big seas to rescue them.

Both sailors agreed that in the prevailing conditions, taking to the inflatable tender had been the best option as this had given them the ability to keep into the waves and keep paddling to stay warm. In the conditions at the time, they would have been tumbled around badly in the liferaft and might well have ended up injured. Of course, weather conditions at the time and the fact that they had been unable to get back to the upturned yacht and liferaft had not given them other options.

As Jean so well said, "We buy expensive yachts to go cruising on, but we don't ever really consider what we should have in grab bags if we should have to leave in a hurry, and often worry about the cost of the extras".

His additional recommendations for emergency grab bags are as follows:

- Warm food – MRE rations that the military uses.
- Mineral Supplements
- Additional Water
- Wet suits/ Survival suits
- Warm dry clothes
- Hats for protection from the sun and to keep you warm at night.
- SART (Search and Rescue Transponder) that will help the ship find you.
- Waterproof Camera to document what happened
- Waterproof VHF in a waterproof bag with extra batteries
- Waterproof bags
- Additional EPIRB ↴

SAILING APP REVIEW RaceQS

By Matthew Thomas

We've all watched the Lipton Cup as well as a number of offshore races where boats have carried trackers and many a conversation has started at the bar after a Wednesday Night's race, saying how great it would be to have trackers on boats for all races.

Not only would it give you the opportunity to look at what happened after racing was finished, but it would also allow friends and family to log in and watch the racing in real time.

Well, it's here and it's free! And every Club should encourage its members to get it for Club events.

RaceQS is being used all over the world and was developed by a sailors for sailors. RaceQS is a simple tracker App that records your sailing data and creates a 3D replay of your race online. The 3D replay will show your boat and any other boats who were recording in your area. You can select anyone in the replay so you can learn from the top performers and after the race you can watch and evaluate your race.

You have the option to upload your tracks immediately via your cell phone or later over WiFi. Turn on the 'Live Broadcast' function and your friends can watch your race 'live' on your RaceQS journal Page.

Using the accelerometers and gyroscope in your smartphone, RaceQS records the motion of your boat which will let you replay your race and evaluate things like heel angle, tacking patterns, boat handling and more.

You can set a timer on the phone to, say five minutes from the start and it will automatically start tracking you during the dial up to the start, without you having to remember to turn it on.

We all want to improve our performance and here is an easy way to do it! Just download the App on your smartphone and let the fun begin.

RaceQS has a very detailed website to support the App, with many tutorials and tips to get the most out of this free App.

Get it at: www.raceqs.com ↴



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