2.4 Launch Driving

Make sure you are using a launch correctly

Responsibilities

Club

- Ensure, if identified as a necessary control measure, that the correct type of launch is used for different club activities
- Ensure only suitably trained and competent launch drivers use club launches
- Ensure that all launch occupants wear lifejackets and clothing appropriate to the prevailing conditions
- Maintain launches and associated safety equipment in good condition
- Ensure that launches are fitted with outboard engine 'kill cords' and that they are used properly
- Ensure that policies are in place so that no launch user goes afloat in unfavourable conditions

Coach (if a launch driver)

- Ensure you are competent to drive and handle the launch in the conditions you are likely to encounter
- Ensure that, if the launch is suitable for rescue, the driver is competent in rescue techniques
- Ensure all the necessary safety equipment provided for the launch is available and carried at all times
- Report any incidents or defects associated with use, storage, coaching from, and handling of, the launch

Competition Organisers

- Ensure that safety launch cover provided at the competition is suitable and adequate as detailed in the Competition Safety Plan
- Hold records of the qualifications, training and experience of safety launch drivers when using their own safety cover

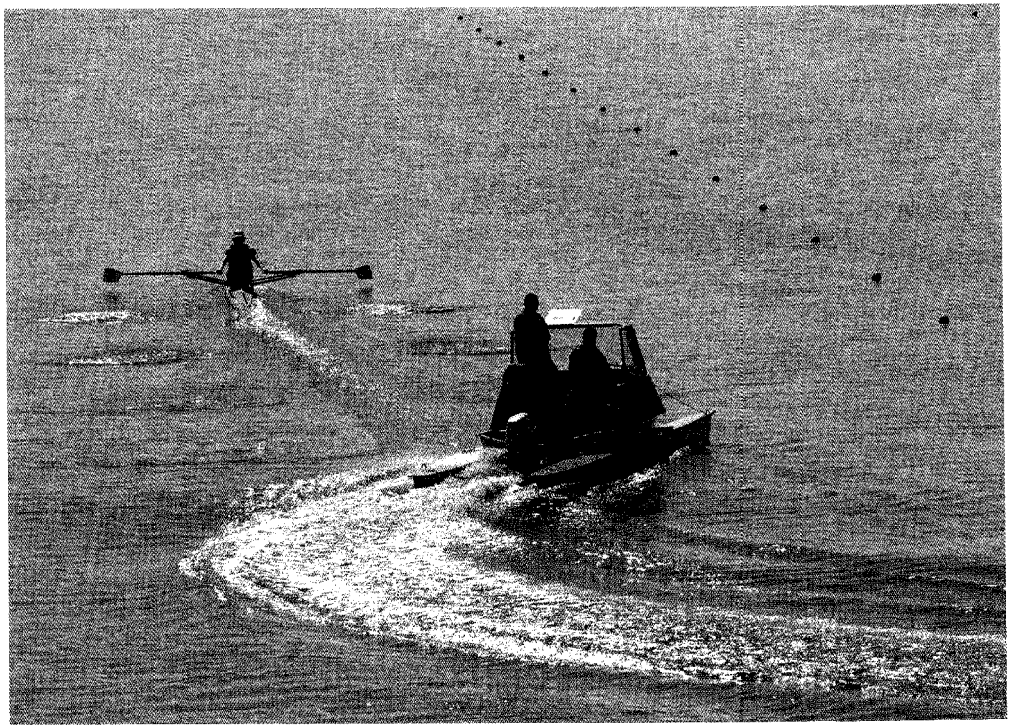
Launch Drivers

- Ensure you are competent to drive and handle the launch in the typical water conditions you will encounter
- Ensure that, if the launch is suitable for rescue, drivers are competent in safety rescue techniques
- Ensure all the necessary safety equipment provided for the launch is available all the time
- Report any incidents or defects associated with use, storage, and handling of the launch

Any launch used for coaching purposes may be called upon for a number of potential situations, including rescuing rowers and boats should they come into difficulty. It must be recognised by clubs that not all launches in use today have the inherent stability to be used to rescue rowers from the water. It is important that the limitations of a particular launch in use are understood by both the club and driver, including the load or number of persons it can support.

It is **not** a reasonable assumption that 'any launch is better than none'. Situations have arisen where a launch driver has attempted to rescue a capsized boat, and the unsuitability of the launch has caused the driver and his passenger to subsequently require rescuing. Clubs and launch drivers should not assume that coaching launches are always rescue launches, and that launch drivers must be capable and confident in rescue techniques.

Clubs should carefully consider the suitability of their launches for the purposes for which they are to be used, particularly when purchasing replacements.



to shore and communication of their journey
- Clubs should recognise that ongoing training in launch driving is of great importance
- Rescue techniques should be practised annually and records kept
- It is necessary to keep boat and engine regularly cleaned and serviced, with this being documented by the club
- Where a club wishes to provide its own safety cover for a competition further training should be sought
- Launch drivers providing safety cover should hold a minimum of RYA safety boat qualification
- Advice should be sought from experts in rescue cover (e.g. Royal Life Saving Society UK) whenever a competition safety plan that includes use of safety boats is being designed
- Whenever possible clubs should consider the provision of external, professional bodies and clubs for the provision of safety cover at competitions

Safety launch drivers guidelines

These guidelines are intended as an aide-memoire for those launch drivers that have passed their RYA Level 2 Powerboat Handling Course and, for those who have yet to take it, as an introduction to some of the principles of safety provision using powered launches. By accepting the role of safety launch driver you are taking on responsibilities towards others so, for your own benefit, you must ensure that you are well trained, well practised and up to date with the current rescue techniques.

It is important to recognise that the primary duty of a safety launch driver is the control of the launch. A crewman must be qualified and trained to carry out rescue, recoveries and first aid without the support of the driver, or the rescue of a casualty may become inefficient and/or pose a danger to the launch, crew, driver, casualty and other river users.

The primary aim of all safety launch drivers is the safety of those taking part in the organised activity, within their area of responsibility, for the duration of the Regatta, Processional Race or other club activity. If the launch is being used in secondary duties, such as any umpiring, marshalling or coaching tasks these must give way to the primary aim of safety should the need arise. Launch drivers must not forget the responsibility for their own safety, and the safety of other river users, whilst performing these duties.

It is not recommended that a safety launch be used for any other secondary duties if possible.

The objectives of all safety launch drivers are to:

- avoid becoming a victim him/herself
- stay at the helm of the boat unless the crew requires assistance with recovering a casualty
- stay in the launch and never enter the water for a rescue
- direct his/her crew to the maximum effect for an efficient rescue
- provide rescue facilities to Regattas, Processional Races, events and other club activities
- recover capsized athletes without worsening their condition
- quickly and safely transport any injured rowers to medical attention (or vice versa)

Safety Launches should always carry a minimum of one crewman for a variety of reasons including to:
- assist the driver by 'spotting' in front of the launch, for debris, river traffic etc
- take over ancillary functions from a coach, for example, using a megaphone, video camera, rate watch etc
- assist with proper trim and balance of the launch, most powerboats require at least 2 persons on board before they will perform and handle optimally, creating the least wash and wake possible
- assist if the driver experiences any difficulties
- assist with rescue, first aid and resuscitation should a rescue be necessary

Launch drivers should be:
- relevantly trained and practised in boat handling and rescue techniques
- trained in resuscitation and first aid. The safety launch may well be the first craft on the scene of an accident so the driver or crewman should hold a valid and recognised First Aid Certificate
- up to date in knowledge and skill

General Points
The maximum load of the launch must be considered when planning safety cover and should not be exceeded under any conditions.

Due to wind and engine noises, trying to shout from a moving powerboat is not very effective. Get in close, stop and speak clearly.

Choose the right clothing for the prevailing weather conditions and bear in mind the potential length of time to be afloat, the possible need for one crew member to enter the water, inactivity for long periods in cold weather and the need for agility when moving about the boat.

Hot drinks on cold days, and vice versa, will maintain the efficiency of the crew.

Boat handling skills should become second nature so that you can concentrate on the task of

rescue without having to think about how you are going to get the boat into the right position.

When manoeuvring outboard powered boats in close quarters make sure that the correct helm is applied before engaging forward and reverse gear. Look in the direction of travel and check the way is clear.

Recovering from the water
When a rower needs to be recovered from the water, the following precautions must be observed:

- The only time high-speed manoeuvres should be used is when making the approach to the scene of an incident or when taking injured rowers back to the landing stage
- Any high-speed approach to the scene must make allowance for the safety of other river users. Use the klaxon or audible warning device to alert other craft. Give way if need be
- The final approach to the rower in the water must be made carefully and at low speed, in order to weigh up the situation and to avoid alarming the person in the water
- On approach provide buoyancy aid (rescue-tube, float or similar) to person in the water
- Talk to the person in the water. Make sure they understand what you intend to do and what you want them to do
- Approach from downstream/downwind, as appropriate, in order to maintain control over your speed and steering
- When bringing the rower aboard, the engine must be turned off so that no injury can be inflicted by the propeller blades. Leaving the gear lever in neutral is not enough as it is easy to knock it whilst attempting to get the rower on board. If the speed of the current or other hazards make this precaution dangerous, then use the anchor to hold the launch in position
- Appropriate training in the provision of first aid to injured rowers will help the safety launch driver to determine the best stage of the rescue to apply first aid

Resuscitation of a non-breathing casualty, treatment of life-threatening bleeds and the maintenance of a clear airway are the main priorities to be considered

Consideration to the continued safety cover of a competition must be observed whilst a safety launch is engaged in the process of a rescue or recovery

Where there are several rowers in the water priority should be give to any injured or younger rowers, or those that are displaying difficulty in remaining above water. Coxswains wearing lifejackets should be told to inflate them and should be the last priority of rescue under normal conditions.

Further information

Row Safe – related sections
- 2.1 Safety Aids
- 1.8 Cold Water Immersion & Hypothermia

ARA website
- Prepare for Launch poster

Other
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution – www.rnli.org.uk
- Royal Yachting Association – www.rya.org.uk
- Spot the Driver poster

Minimum standards to be adopted

- All launches should carry a plate stating the maximum weight it can safely support, together with this translated into the number of adults. This must be considered when planning safety cover
- All launch drivers should hold as a minimum the RYA Level 2 powerboat certificate (appropriate to water conditions; tidal v non-tidal) or equivalent
- All launch drivers and passengers must wear appropriate lifejackets at all times
- All launch drivers must carry an appropriate form of communication device to summon help where necessary (eg, mobile telephone or marine VHF). Launch drivers must know emergency frequencies or numbers in case of an emergency (these can be laminated and stuck inside the launch). If carrying a marine VHF radio, the operator must hold a Short Range Certificate (SRC) and follow correct radio procedure at all times
- All launch drivers must be aware of the rules of the water upon which they are operating and at all times, except in an emergency situation, adhere to the speed limits in place on that stretch of water
- In dark or low visibility situations, launches must follow anti-collision regulations by following the necessary navigation rules, and displaying the correct navigation lights on all waters as specified by "Safety of Life at Sea" (SOLAS)
- All launches must carry as a minimum:
    - First Aid kit in a waterproof bag, checked monthly
    - a throw line or equivalent grab line
    - minimum toolkit and spares for the engine (if necessary)
    - safety knife with rope cutter
    - foil blankets or "Bivvi bags" enough for the passenger load capacity of the launch
    - spare PFDs
    - length of spare rope
    - anchor and line appropriate for the conditions (if necessary)
    - boathook
    - spare kill-cord for use in the event of the driver over board
    - audio signalling device: air horn, loudhailer, megaphone etc
    - bailer
    - paddle
    - for Inflatables or Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs), a pump for the sponsons plus a spare valve, valve cap, and a repair kit (if necessary)
    - spare fuel (if necessary)
    - simple handholds fixed to the side of the launch to provide assistance to a person being rescued and to provide self help should the driver fall overboard
- Before going afloat launch drivers must check that the launch is carrying the appropriate emergency equipment listed above
- Launches used for safety cover should:
    - be fitted with a propeller guard
    - have sufficient stability to allow safe recovery of victims from the water
    - be quick and manoeuvrable.
    - be designed not to create an excessive wash
    - have adequate capacity to be capable of carrying injured persons back to the boathouse quickly and safely
    - have a freeboard low enough, and sufficient buoyancy, to ease extraction of the victim from the water
    - Carry a 'rescue tube' (a 930mm length high-buoyancy foam tube developed especially for water rescue) or other flotation device suitable for supporting a casualty in the water
    - have space to lie a victim down in the boat to allow resuscitation or cater for injury
    - be properly equipped for rescue
    - be well maintained, with documented maintenance and servicing

Note: Aluminium 'Tin Fish', coaching catamarans and traditional long and narrow-beam 'low-wash' coaching launches are not suitable for rescue. Clubs should consider small cathedral-hulled dories or whalers, 5m+ RIBs or inflatable boats, with a propeller-guarded outboard motor suitable for the conditions (recommended minimum of 15hp).

Further good practice

(In addition to minimum standards to be adopted)

- Clubs should ensure that rescue techniques are practised and recorded at least once every year by all launch drivers
- Additional spares to be carried - Spare PFDs (accounting for largest single boat liable for rescue less capacity of launch), spare fuel tank (open water use), spare engine (open water use), engine spares
- Alternative means of contacting shore, in-date flares, maps, navigation aids or GPS system
- When choosing a new safety and/or coaching launch, clubs should consider 4-stroke engines where possible to reduce noise, emissions and pollution
- Use of 'Tin Fish' as a suitable coaching and safety launch should be phased out by clubs and not used to provide safety cover for a session or competition
- Launch drivers must never take to the water on their own without means of contact