

Dismasting checklist



DISMASTED – IMMEDIATE ACTION

It is vital that the moment the mast goes over the side someone, preferably the skipper, or a crew member with previous experience, takes charge. The yacht and crew are in grave danger in the immediate aftermath. Here is a suggested plan of action.

- **Don't panic.** Don't start the engine – there will be wire and rope in the water.
- **Hold an immediate roll-call,** check for personal injuries and assess the physical and mental state of the crew.
- **Make an assessment of the damage** to the

rig, and where the mast and boom are lying.

- **If the mast is overboard** with a sharp, broken end there is a real risk the hull could be holed. In big seas it will almost certainly be too dangerous to try to secure the mast and boom or to lift them on deck, so cut the rigging and let it sink, or stream it as a sea anchor if conditions allow.
- **In calmer conditions** anything you can save, particularly the boom or a substantial length of mast, may be invaluable for a jury rig. Use rope slings to secure spars alongside and parbuckle* them aboard. This will be easier if the sails have

been cut away first. You may be able to save the jib; you are unlikely to save the main.

- **If the mast has fallen on deck,** secure it immediately. Then attend to any sails that have fallen overboard. Dump them rather than risk crew injury trying to recover them.
- **Check there are no wires,** ropes or sails left in the water to foul the prop. You can now start the engine.
- **Depending on how far** you are from a safe haven, you can either motor in or consider a jury rig.



CALLING FOR HELP

- **Carry an emergency radio aerial.**

You will lose your main radio aerial with the mast.

- **A dismasted yacht** within motoring distance of safety is not strictly a MAYDAY case but a PAN PAN call would be appropriate if you're in range.

- **If you are voyaging beyond motoring range,** you should carry a 406 EPIRB but don't set it off until you really need outside assistance.

- **Don't take to the liferaft** unless the boat has been holed and is sinking.



SAVING THE RIG

In almost all cases, when part of the rig or the mast fails, the rig goes by the board. Occasionally quick action can save the situation, at least temporarily, and maybe long enough for an emergency repair to be made.

- **Steer away from the failure.** If a windward shroud fails, tack leaving the genoa sheeted so that you heave to. This will stop the boat, reduce pounding and put the load on the other shroud. If a forestay fails, steer down wind and vice versa for the backstay.
- **Having stabilised the rig, don't reduce sail too soon unless over-pressed.** The sails will dampen motion and prevent the boat rolling,

which may transfer the load from the good stay back to the broken one.

- **If the backstay fails upwind, don't ease the main.** The leach combined with the mainsheet and kicker will keep the mast up almost indefinitely.
- **A spare halyard or the topping lift** can make an excellent temporary stay.
- **If your course is to windward make progress in a series of broad tacks** to reduce the shock loads of pounding into waves.
- **If you see the rig start to fall,** steer so that the mast drops over the side rather than on to the deck where it might injure crew members.



CAUSES OF RIG FAILURE

- **Most dismastings are caused by the failure of a rigging terminal.** Stainless-steel wire very seldom breaks except where it enters a terminal.
- **T-ball terminals** are more likely to fail than tangs.
- **Many terminals fail because of poor alignment between stay and stemhead** or shroud plate. Make sure you have toggles which allow alignment both fore and aft and athwartships.

- **If the mast fails before the rigging, it will probably be due to fatigue in the alloy** caused by excessive 'panting'. Panting, the fore and aft movement of the centre section of the spar, occurs in heavy seas when the mast is insufficiently well supported along its length. If you are concerned that your mast is panting, use the spinnaker topping lift as an emergency inner forestay. In the long term, fit running backstays or checkstays.

OFFSHORE RIGGING KIT



Any skipper planning longer passages offshore should carry equipment to cope with a dismasting and to put up a jury rig.

MUST HAVE

- **Wire cutters** (Note: many domestic bolt croppers will not cope with stainless-steel wire)
- **Lump hammer**
- **Hacksaw**
- **Large adjustable spanner with pipe to extend handle**
- **Sharp cold chisel**
- **Marlin spike**
- **Sharp knife**
- **Selection of shackles**
- **Long lengths of rope, preferably non-stretch of the Spectra type**
- **Toggles**
- **Bulldog clamps**
- **Long bolts**
- **Blocks/snatch blocks large enough to take a rope the size of a genoa sheet or rope halyard**
- **Seizing wire**
- **Selection of split pins and rings**
- **Insulating and duct tape**
- **Machine and self-tapping screws**

CONSIDER CARRYING

- **Riveting kit**
- **Handy-billy tackle*** (useful for tensioning rig)
- **Swageless terminal kit**
- **Zinc chromate paste** (for insulating dissimilar metals)
- **Mast sleeving kit**
- **At least one length of wire longer than and as big in diameter as your largest stay or shroud**

YM PLUS
On-line supplement
www.yachtingmonthly.com

YM would like to thank Peter Ellis and The British Offshore Sailing School (BOSS). Contact: www.boss-sail.co.uk