BOAT CREW BASICS

A GUIDE FOR BOAT CREW CANDIDATES & MENTORS

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Toughest Boat Crew Tasks?

Preparing to conduct QE Dockside Oral Interviews and Underway Check Rides at the recent Div. 5 OPTREX at Station Vallejo, I was asked what tasks seem to be most difficult for Crew and Coxswain candidates. While I was tempted to consider some of the tasks that require meticulous chart work and math, such as computing Tide Heights or Current Velocities at Secondary Stations or some difficult first-aid task, I came up with two that surprised several members. I stated, and it's true, that in over 23 years as a QE I have rarely seen Coxn candidates get the Alongside Tow set up correctly, nor have I seen Crew candidates do a great job with the Heaving Line! This month I'll cover the heaving line, next month the tow.

"How can that be?", someone asked, "we practice those all the time!" "Granted," I replied, "but you'd be surprised at how many problems our people seem to have with these two basic tasks". So I thought I'd get into the details, to help those preparing for QE exams and those who mentor them, to do a better job.

Using the heaving line seems straightforward enough, you coil it up and then let fly at the target: simplicity itself. Yet invariably, crew candidates fail to prepare the line properly and are greeted with 10-foot tosses when they wanted 35-50 feet or so! What goes wrong?

Typically the 'heaver' commits one or more of several common mistakes. These include coiling up the entire length of line despite not need it all, sloppily bunching up the coiled line so that it gets tangled up before being thrown, letting the weighted ball out too far, and using an awkward tossing technique that fails. Let's examine each of these flaws.

For unknown reasons many coxswains configure heaving lines of 150 feet or so in length, despite the fact that it's rarely needed and few crewmen can successfully toss that much line. If you end up with one of these, leave half of its length on the sole of the cockpit. Then, when coiling the line, pay attention to stacking each coil next to, but not on top of the other. Your objective is to let the supply of heaving line pay out smoothly from your hand, rather than become entangled into a mess.

When you have the length you need coiled up uniformly in the left hand (for righties) which is about 2/3 of what you want to toss, coil up the remainder in the heaving hand. Practice with several techniques until you are able to reliably and accurately place the line where you want it. Hold the ball directly, or close to your hand. Remember, you want to have the weighted end go up, over and past the target boat's deck near their crewman.

Now pay some attention to how you're going to heave the ball or weighted end. Practice with overhand and underhand techniques. You'll need to adjust for the height of the gunwale on your boat, as it's easy for an underhanded toss to crash into the gunwale and never make it out of the cockpit! For that reason I favor an overhand toss, actually a ¾ overhand toss seems to work well for me. Hold your left hand open and flat, to allow the line to pay out unobstructed.