

MAIB SAFETY BULLETIN 2/2006

Gybing on yachts - two separate accidents resulting
in life threatening injuries to crew members

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This document, containing safety lessons, has been produced for marine safety purposes only, on the basis of information available to date.

The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2005 provide for the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents to make recommendations at any time during the course of an investigation if, in his opinion, it is necessary or desirable to do so.

In two separate, but virtually identical accidents, two crew members of yachts involved in racing were very seriously injured when they were struck on the head by fining tuning blocks which form part of the main sheet arrangement on this type of boat. Both accidents occurred when the yachts were undertaking planned gybes in strong winds.

This Safety Bulletin is issued so that the safety lessons from the MAIB's preliminary examination into the causes and circumstances of the two accidents are promulgated to the owners, operators and crew of yachts ahead of the main 2006 summer yachting season.



Stephen Meyer
Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents

This bulletin is also available on our website: <http://www.maib.gov.uk>

Press Enquiries: 020 7944 3232/3387; out of hours: 020 7944 4292

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BACKGROUND

In separate, but similar accidents, two crew members of yachts suffered serious head injuries when the boats were performing a gybe.

The yachts, which were identical Jeanneau 'Sunfast 37', Bermudan rig 10.75m vessels, were sailing under reefed mainsails only; one with a single reef and one with 2 reefs, in winds of about 30 knots. In both accidents the injuries occurred when the crew members were struck by the fine tuning block, which forms part of the main sheet arrangements on these boats, (see Figures 1 and 2) as the boom passed across the cockpit during the gybe. One of the crewmembers was also thrown across the cockpit by the impact and sustained further injuries as a consequence.

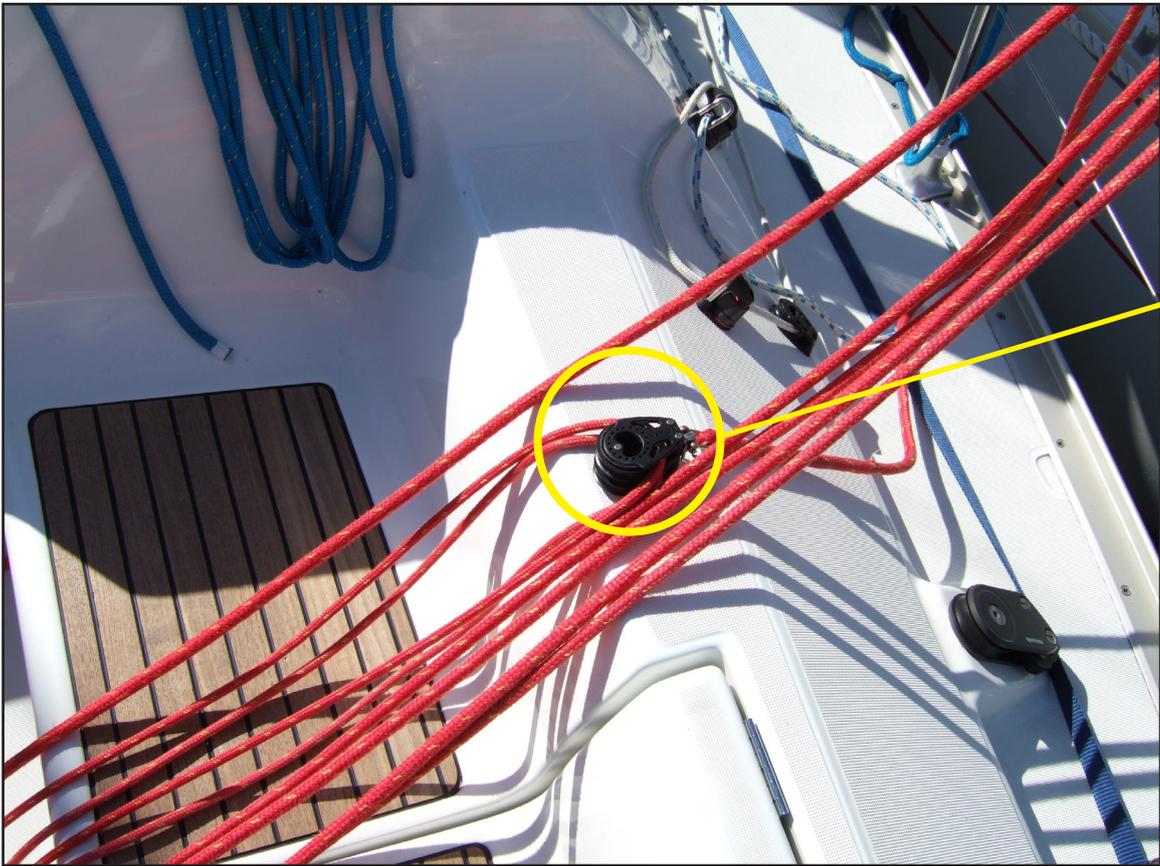
In both cases, the gybe manoeuvre was planned and the boats' crews properly forewarned, though in one case the manoeuvre could be considered a crash gybe, as the crew were physically forcing the mainsail across the wind in order to position the boat favourably prior to the start of a race.

Both of the injured crew suffered life threatening injuries as a result of the accidents and spent a considerable time in intensive care units.

The crews on both boats all had previous sailing experience, but this was the first time either crew had sailed together as a unit. Some of the individuals, including one of the injured persons, had not sailed on boats as large or with the degree of racing performance as the yachts on which the accidents occurred.

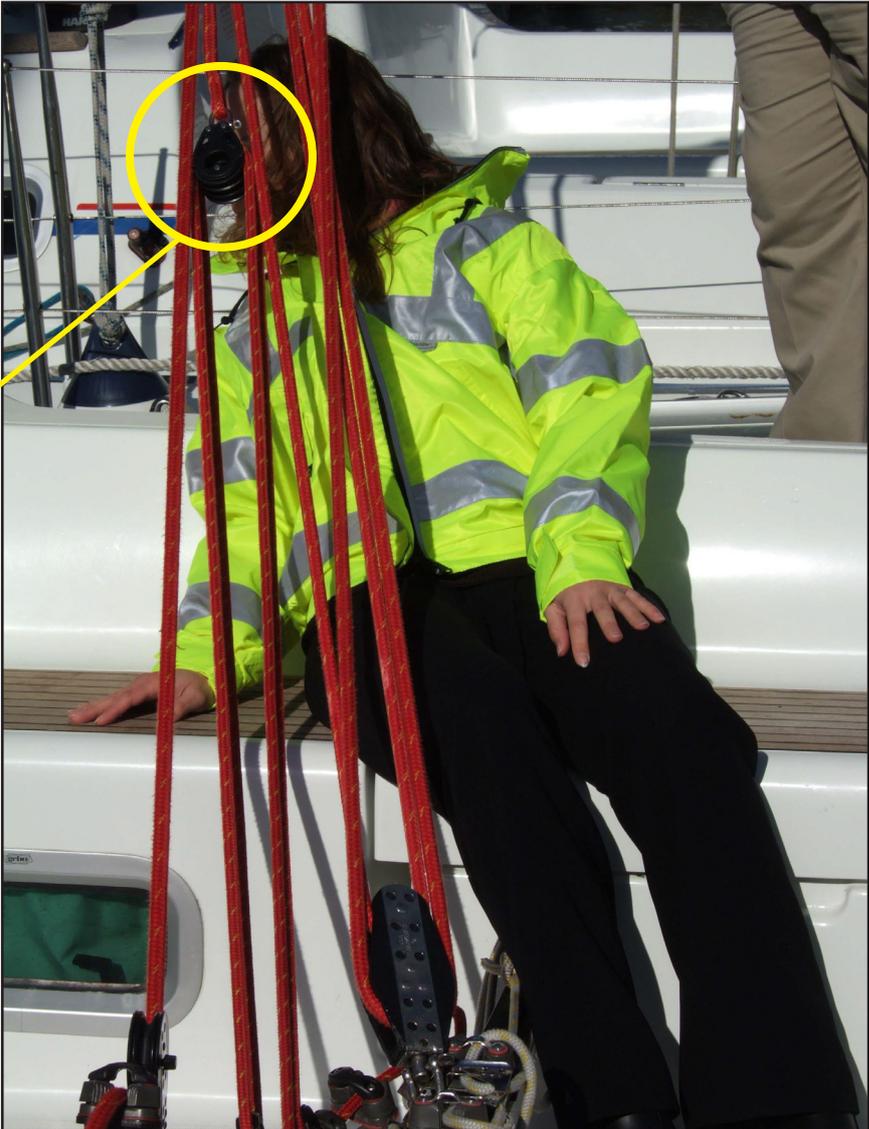
SAFETY LESSONS

- 1. Skippers should ensure that when giving a brief before sailing, they take into account the crew's experience on similar boats and their familiarity with the rig, fittings and associated hazards on the boat.**
- 2. The main hazard associated with a gybe is generally perceived to be the movement of the boom. This accident demonstrates the need to ensure that all crew members are also made aware of the dangers of being struck by the sheets and associated gear as the boom passes overhead during the gybe.**
- 3. Charter companies should ensure that the briefing given to crews on handover should stress any specific hazards on the boat which members of the crew may not have previously encountered.**



Fine tuning block

Figure 1



The fine tuning block is at head height when sailing - crew should keep clear of this, particularly during a gybe

Figure 2