

They Should Have Bought a Motorhome

MR. OBNOXIOUS

We were northbound on the ICW Adams Creek in North Carolina. Ahead of us I could see a southbound barge pushed by a large tug and between the barge and Congrio a 30ish foot sailboat also headed northbound under power. At this point the ICW is very wide and so passing instructions are never requested since it is easy to just stay to our side (the right side of the channel) and pass port to port, or as the tug boat operator would call it, "on the one."

Our VHF radio channel 16 came to life with an obviously stressed voice calling the southbound tug boat. It took a couple of tries. Commercial vessels monitor channel 13 which is why we monitor both 13 and 16 and only call commercial vessels, when necessary, on channel 13 the one they actually listen to. I believe inland tugs keep the volume on their channel 16 radio low to avoid the annoying chatter. Nevertheless, the tug eventually responded on channel 16. The guy in the sailboat wanted the tug to know that he was there and asked how he should pass him. The tug was polite and said they are lined up to pass port to port and so that is what they will do. Crisis averted but it elicited a chuckle from us as another example of a person operating a boat before knowing how.

We overtook and passed the same sailboat as we were exiting Adams Creek into the Neuse River. A minute later we heard "Congrio Congrio this is My Dream" on VHF channel 16. Sheesh, him again. I responded to the call and suggested moving up one channel to 17 to talk. After establishing communication on channel 17, the guy announced that he noticed that we were trailing a line in the water. A line in the water is an embarrassing boating faux pas and, like an unzipped fly, unless one is certain that it is going to cause problems it is most kind to just look the other way and not bring it to a fellow boater's attention. Recovering quickly I realized that he was looking at our anchor snubber line that is attached to an eye on the bow at the waterline and at the moment, since we were underway, was led through the port chock and tied securely to a bitt. I thanked him for his concern, said the line is secure, and signed off to return to monitor channel 16, commenting out loud that the guy believes he is a fraternal member of a boating community.

An hour or so later we were out in Pamlico Sound and as often happens in North Carolina strong winds ahead of an afternoon thunderstorm overtook us. My Dream was back on the radio this time calling the Coast Guard. "Him again," I said, "What now."

"Coast Guard" he said, "I am in a severe thunderstorm what should I do, where should I go?" The Coast Guard ran through the usual list of questions, What is your location? He was not exactly sure but knew that he had exited the Neuse River north on the ICW. How many persons aboard? One man and a dog. Are you taking on water? No. Are there any injuries or medical

emergencies? No. Are you wearing a PFD? Yes. I wondered about the dog. Do you have an anchor? Yes.

After all that was established the guy on My Dream insisted that he was very frightened and wanted the Coast Guard tell him what to do. The Coast Guard man on the radio was kind not to laugh at him and gently explained that since he was not there on the boat with him and not even sure of his location it is not practical to offer advice, except, "Can you anchor your boat?" "Yes." My Dream replied. "Then I suggest that you drop your anchor immediately."

"Okay" My Dream replied "But would you call me periodically to check on me?" Coast Guard with more suppressed laughter, "No, we don't do that." "Oh," said My Dream, "then I'll call you so that you know I am alright." We were by now laughing our asses off and completely entertained by Mr. Obnoxious but sorry that he had put his helpless dog at risk.

In the end Mr. Obnoxious did call the Coast Guard and let them know that he was fine and no longer needed their assistance. That, no doubt, was the best thing the Coast Guard man heard all day.

IT'S A WONDER HE MADE IT TO 83

Later the same year we were southbound offshore Georgia doing an overnight passage. Over several days listened to the usual may days, pan pans, and security calls from naval warships guiding boats out of the way of live fire exercises. One pan pan that was repeated over and over concerned an 83 year old man making a non-stop voyage alone from Hampton VA to St. Augustine FL. He was overdue and the Coast Guard was asking all vessels to keep a lookout for him. Some people have more courage than sense. That route has heavy ship traffic and large ships are not looking out for small boats. When did he think he was going to get some sleep? When we passed St. Augustine the same call was still going out every hour but unfortunately no surprise, the man was never found.

CESAR GOT A BRAND NEW BOAT

Summer weekends in the Chesapeake are always entertaining. This year in one day we heard a trifecta of a grounding, a boat on fire, and a boater notify the Coast Guard that he had pick up two survivors from an airplane crash.

The next day Cesar B aboard a sailboat called the Coast Guard to ask for help. When they asked the nature of his distress he reported that he was anchored because the ignition key had broken off in his ignition and he could not get his engine started. It is worth noting here that there was plenty of wind that day and sailboats can actually move without a motor. I know this because we often sailed places, even into a marina.

They asked him to provide his position which did not know although he could see land. The Coast Guard guy was encouraged so he asked if he could describe what he saw. Cesar provided a perfect description that fit nearly every point of land on Chesapeake Bay. He did manage to remember he had recently departed Slaughter Creek.

It was time to switch from emergency calling channel 16 to working Coast Guard channel 22A. Cesar didn't think his radio had channel 22A. They all do but that is a technicality, so the Coast Guard guy ask what channels he did have. They settled on Channel 12. We could not miss this so we also switched to channel 12 to continue listening.

Coast Guard guy then asked for his cell phone number. This is somewhat new to us. The Coast Guard, at least on the east coast, now uses cell phones for communicating with boaters who call them. Cesar had to confess that his cell phone had recently run out of battery.

Still on channel 12 Cesar said he would like a tow. The Coast Guard asked with what tow service does he have membership. Towing small boats is like the Auto Club, pay annual dues and get free towing. Not a member and you are a salvage situation, and it is very expensive. Cesar apparently was not aware of this. He cheerfully said he was not a member of any service. The Coast Guard set it up with SeaTow and reported to Cesar that SeaTow would be on scene on about one and one-half hour. "Oh, good news." Cesar replied. When he learns the cost it will not seem like good news. Especially since he could have simply raised his sails and sailed into the marina.

SeaTow called Cesar to report that they were on the way. Cesar could hear SeaTow but his radio was so weak that SeaTow, one and one-half hour away, could not hear him. Normally I don't get involved with stupid boaters but in this instance I had been listening to Cesar for so long I felt like I knew him. So, I jumped in, called SeaTow and said I can hear both sides of the conversation and would be happy to relay for them. I did, SeaTow was happy, Cesar was happy, and I was happy to be so entertained for the past 30 minutes.

NEW YORK HARBOR ON A SUMMER SUNDAY AFTERNOON

New York Harbor is loaded with crazy people who should not be out on boats on Sunday afternoons. In the span of four hours traveling from the south harbor up the East River to Manhasset Bay we heard several rescue calls to the Coast Guard. One boat lost the use of its propeller and rudder presumably because of debris on the East River. Another ran aground north of the Tappan Zee Bridge on the Hudson. Then there was a woman who called, obviously inexperienced using a marine radio, using all the wrong words she managed to communicate that the boom knocked her boyfriend overboard near the George Washington Bridge and he was swept away in the current. The nature of her distress was she was alone and did not know how to sail. Boyfriend apparently managed to swim ashore so the task of the Coast Guard was how to get him from shore back on his boat before she ran aground.

NAKED BOY

The most curious call of the day came from the vessel Ambrosia on the Harlem River. They reported that they had plucked a mid-twenties male person out of the river who was in serious physical distress. Apparently the swimmer, inspired by the beautiful sunny day, stripped off all his clothes and plunged headlong into the Harlem River. Not a pleasant place to swim on any day in my estimation. The Harlem River current is quite strong and he was immediately swept away in the cool 63 degree water. The fact that the swimmer was naked likely contributed to his distress.

The Coast Guard managed to stall for time by repeating the usual series of questions over and over like ground hog day until the swimmer managed to catch his breath turning a rescue situation into, how do we get rid of this guy situation. In their desperation Ambrosia was reaching out to anyone who would listen, even contacting NYPD Marine Patrol to get the guy off the boat. Finally, a jet ski came by and they somehow convinced the jet skier to give naked boy a ride back to his clothes. Case closed.