

August 3, 1998

Dear Member,

On Wednesday, July 29, J/24 #12 was participating in a club race. The wind was from the West at 18 knots. As the race started, a wind storm blew up with gusts of 25-30 knots. Several teams attempted to fly spinnakers, including #12. #12 spun out of control several times. During one broach, her spinnaker filled with water, causing a complete capsize and preventing the boat from righting herself. #12 then went completely turtle.

Several other boats were on the scene immediately. All of the sailors were pulled from the water safely and without injury. #12 righted itself but had filled with water, apparently through an aft lazarette which had opened. The Race Committee boat tried to tie off to #12 to prevent her sinking but the Police boat at the scene ordered the race committee boat away. #12 sank in 65 feet of water in the vicinity of the green buoy in front of the Statue of Liberty.

Before #12 sank, a 100 ft line with life jackets was attached so the exact location was known. Back at dock, a salvage operation began immediately and a diving company was contracted. Work began the next morning and #12 was raised to the surface by early afternoon. By 5:30 p.m., she was back at the club dock. Refurbishment of the boat, engine and electrical system continued through the weekend.

The seriousness of this incident needs no amplification. It is fortunate that no one was hurt or injured. The sinking of #12 should serve as a wake-up call to all members.

First and foremost is the issue of safety. #12 sank due to extreme operator error. It is clear that the combination of wind, sail selection and crew were not in balance. In addition, #12 failed to heed the warning signals, spinning out of control with the spinnaker up.

If you attempt to operate a boat beyond the experience and ability of your crew, you could be putting many people in danger. Why people take such risks is a complex issue. It is a dangerous and short-sighted thing to do.

The sinking of #12 illustrates some other concerns. In this race with strong winds, how many sailors were wearing life jackets? One quick broach or slip is all that it takes for a crew to get separated from a boat. How many boats at least had a life jacket or throwable cushion in the cockpit, easily accessible in case someone fell overboard? And how many boats had locked their lazarettes and forehatches to prevent water coming in case they broached? This is a clear signal to take safety precautions more seriously.

These lessons apply to cruisers in addition to racers. How many members have been sailing in strong winds this spring and summer? Were your crew wearing life jackets or did you

at least have lifejackets or a throwable cushion at the ready? Had you locked your lazarettes and forward hatch?

A final note on this episode. When #12 broached and turtled, most boats in the race saw what was happening. Only 2 of them dropped their sails and stood by for assistance. By continuing to sail away, the rest of the fleet demonstrated a lack of judgment and disregard for the seriousness of the situation. If any boat in the harbor ever appears stricken or in need of assistance, all boats should cease what they are doing and head to the scene.

I sincerely hope this will be a watershed experience for all members, current and future. I urge everyone to keep safety first and foremost in their minds, especially when winds are strong. One of the biggest risks our members face is falling off a boat without a flotation device and being separated by the current. This should not be underestimated and everyone should think carefully about this issue and what precautions they should take.

In other news, the MYC Single-Handed J/24 Championship will be competed on Tuesday evening, August 25. Top three finishers last year were TJ Dalton, Bruce Stone and Jamie Weyndling. Skippers can use mains, jibs, genoas or spinnakers. The only rule is no shouting at the crew. This race is limited to 12 entries. Tony Nicoletti will handle registration.

There are other races later this year. First is The Great Race, our annual club championship. This will be competed on Saturday and Sunday, September 19 & 20. The Great Race is open to boats larger than our J/24s. It starts in the harbor and races 50 miles down the Jersey Shore to the Manasquan inlet and then back to Manhattan. This year, The Great Race will consist of two smaller races, first down to Manasquan and second back to Manhattan. This will allow boats to pull into the Manasquan inlet for the night and have a race party at the Tiki Bar on the Pt. Pleasant boardwalk.

Second is the Ambrose Light Race. This will be held on Saturday, October 3. This is the traditional marathon for our J/24 fleet with good winds necessary to complete the race by sunset. This race is only open to MYC members and boats are limited so sign up now.

This year, we are also introducing a new race, the Round the Statue Race. This will be for Lasers. The course will start at Pier 25, round the Statue of Liberty in either direction and finish at Pier 25. This race will be held on Sunday, August 30, at 10:30 a.m.

Our Fleet Captain program continues to grow and we now have Fleet Captain sails on Monday, Thursday and Friday evenings and Saturday and Sunday mornings and afternoons. With so much participation, we need more Skipper members to volunteer. This is a great way to get sailing without the time hassle of coordinating crew. Also, if you have reserved a boat and are sailing with just one other person, please let the office know if you would be willing to take more members. The Fleet Captain program has been very successful and I continue to encourage all skipper members to volunteer and participate.

Recently, our club was approached by the Young America syndicate which is trying to win the America's Cup for the New York Yacht Club. The marketing group of Young America is trying to meet with corporations to solicit sponsorships. They requested the ability to send a letter to our membership. Normally, we do not allow people to send letters to our members for any reason. Doing so would create many complicated issues. However, since this is a sailing issue and the person who made the request has provided assistance to our club in the past, we

agreed. Young America has written a letter which was delivered to our office where we applied labels. Our mailing list was never given out and this one-time use will not result in a flood of unsolicited mail.

The following was received from member Mike Dora for publication to members:

*Attention Parade Lovers – Macys New York is eager to recruit volunteers to assist with their annual Thanksgiving Day Parade, by acting a “tailers” for the large balloons. Each tailer will be seated on a John Deere vehicle, which will serve as an “anchor” for each large balloon in the Parade. Each of these vehicles will have 2 crew, a driver, and the tailer, whose task will be to monitor and control the static line between the vehicle and the balloon. Knowledge of knots, line controls, etc, is essential – which is why Macys thought of asking Manhattan Yacht Club members to assist! To qualify, you must be physically fit, must attend a mandatory training session, and must of course be prepared to have the time of your life on Thanksgiving Day (November 26) in front of 80 million TV viewers across America. Two training sessions per day will be conducted 17 and 18 October at the Polytechnic University, Farmingdale, NY and one session from 1000-1400 will be conducted November 7 at the Stevens Institute, Hoboken, NJ. As noted, a minimum of one training session must be attended to qualify to participate in the parade. Volunteer now, only 35 places are available! The club’s point of contact for this activity is Mike Dora who can be reached at (212) 963-3616 (day) or (212) 758-0694 (evening).*

Thanks to all members who have participated and helped the club in many ways this season. At the half-way point, it sure has been terrific!

Sincerely,

Michael W. Fortenbaugh  
Commodore