



December 02, 2019

Update: Emirates Team New Zealand

Safety Training.

Preparation is paramount when sailing any vessel, but when pushing the boundaries of innovation and speed in an America's Cup Class boat, it takes on an additional level of importance to ensure the wellbeing of all crew and the boat itself.

For the Emirates Team New Zealand sailing and on water support team the safety procedures are an evolving process of constant improvement and adaption to minimise risk and damage from everything between a worst-case scenario and an untimely nose dive which buries the boat in white water before lifting off to take flight again and carry on its way.

Unexpected events on the water can come from a number of areas, be it human error while learning to optimise sailing technique, to gear breakage, or urgent action as can happen from time to time, but what the crew of Emirates Team New Zealand have been learning is the AC75's are inherently forgiving with the odd mishap, but nevertheless always require everyone to be well and truly on their toes to get the maximum out of the boat on the water.

"Some incidents look far worse from off the AC75 than they are onboard," said Chris Salthouse who is the head of on water operations for the team.

"There have been one or two moments witnessed that to the outsider seem like a major incident, but the guys on board just take it in their stride and carry on sailing. We are in constant verbal communication from the chase boat with the crew on the boat and with the data stream coming off we can see when things are on the edge or entirely under control. But none of this stops anyone on the water dropping their shoulders for a second."

Prior to even launching 'Te Aihe' the Emirates Team New Zealand sailing team ran through a comprehensive water safety course lead by grinder and former Surf Life Saver Steven Ferguson.

"It may seem simple, but the lessons you learn and the little bits of information you gather simply by running through processes and discussion when bobbing around a freezing cold pool are invaluable.

It's never something that is very comfortable for anyone thinking about and preparing for the worst, but it is vitally important that we do this as a group and acknowledge the risks, maximise the safety and minimise the impact on the sailors and the boat itself."

"In the case of a capsize the first thing to do is quickly and accurately assess the situation." Said Ray Davies.

"We run a buddy and numbering system with each of us onboard the boat, as well as a signal system to communicate with the chase boat and first response team so everyone can prioritise who is OK and who needs help first.

“We are certainly taking our safety seriously. All the boys get in the pool to see what it’s like with all the sailing kit on, to see how the buoyancy feels and to get comfortable using the spare air oxygen bottles if needed under the water.

With all the precautions the team takes, it is always important to be ready to adapt, because it is rare that things play out as expected.

“All of our guys are generally very comfortable in the water, but the more time you spend doing something that’s not normal for you is important.” said Blair Tuke. “But it’s key to get together, and put ourselves through a couple of scenarios, that first response stuff in case we do have a big wipe out.”

But at the end of the day, this is sailing and we are no different to offshore or Olympic sailors, or even your average bloke fishing from his boat on the Hauraki Gulf, everyone should take safety at sea and all necessary precautions seriously to get the most amount of enjoyment out of what they are doing.

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