

Boat Handling in Rough Water

Boats and crews are at maximum danger when launching and getting ashore when speed and helpers are essential.

The Launch

Extra care must be taken while the boat is on the beach that gates are tight, bonnets water tight etc. The crew should be opposite their riggers with at least one spare helper holding the bows and 2 on the stern whose job is to ensure the stern does not crash down on the beach as the crew get in. If the cox is light enough he can be lifted into the boat while it is still ashore. The wave pattern should be watched so that the launch can take place when conditions are most favorable.

When the decision to launch is made the boat should be lifted and run into the water directly into the direction of the waves. As soon as the bow is supported by water bow and 2 should jump in (preferably bottom first, swinging their legs in after) and immediately push the blades out to the buttons and start rowing together without bothering about shoes or footstraps. The bow handler should make sure the bow is being lifted directly into the waves but as soon as the bow pair start rowing he must get out of the way of the blades quickly and wait to see the launch is completed correctly. As soon as the bow pair are rowing stroke and 3 (and cox if not already seated) must also get in and start rowing to get the boat clear of any breaking surf. The stern launchers should only release the stern with a hard shove when they are satisfied the rudder is clear of the beach.

When the cox is satisfied the boat is well clear of any breaking surf he should order the crew to paddle light while still pointing the bows into the waves and then tell the stroke and three to easy while they put their feet in shoes or stop and get themselves comfortable. Bow and 2 should continue paddling light to keep way on the boat so the cox can control it until stroke and 3 can start paddling when bow and 2 can easy and get comfortable.

If self bailers are fitted which flood back when stopped or slow the crew must ensure that they are closed when stationary or doing buoy turns. Every opportunity should be taken to keep the boat as dry as possible (shoes are good bailers) and coxes should avoid getting directly broadside to the waves.

As the bow begins to rise to a wave by pulling on the rudder into the wave and then releasing it as the wave passes down the boat the boat will ride over a wave better.

Racing when rough

Keep calm and pay attention to the wave patterns. If the sea is following try and get on a roller and keep on it with fast short strokes as long as possible. When falling back into a trough adjust speed to ensure a wave does not break over the stern. If heading into the sea there is little point in driving the bow into a breaking wave but apply full pressure when the bow is being lifted by a wave. Cox and stroke should work together to make the ride as comfortable as possible and the rest of the crew must to every variation to keep the boat moving.

If the boat is obviously filling up keep clam and keep paddling turn the boat towards any safe beach taking advantage of any wind and tide. It is better to get the boat ashore yourselves rather than sitting in the boat waving arms to attract a rescue boat when you risk capsizing if you let go of your oar. If necessary have 2 rowing and the other 2 holding blades flat on the water to keep the boat level while backing if possible.

If a rescue boat does come to your aid stay in the boat unless a competent person tells you to get out into the rescue boat. Transfer the cox to the rescue boat and if possible stay in boat with blades flat on water while bow holds the tow rope (do not make it fast).

Coming Ashore

Do not approach the beach broadside to the beach as if a wave hits you broadside it will knock you all over. If it is a gentle sloping sandy beach such as Bournemouth it is OK to approach the beach bow first in the direction of the waves. Loosen your gates so that on the order out bow etc you can lift out your oar and throw it away clear of the boat on getting out and when all out flip the boat upside down and carrying it out on your shoulders. Shore helpers should come into the water again to carry bow and stern. Speed is essential and when boat is ashore recover blades.

If the beach is steep shingle and shelving turn the boat outside the surf line and back it in gently so the bow is pointing directly into the waves. Gates should be loosened and as the beach is approached stroke and 3 should get out throwing their blades clear of the boat. Bow and 2 should keep backing being ready if necessary to pull the boat back out to sea until they are in their depth when they should also get out throwing their blades away and once again the crew must spin the boat over with the help of shore helpers to carry it out shoulder high recovering any seats which fallout and blades once the boat is safely ashore.

Crews on beach during racing

Always keep an eye on the safety of crews afloat. If you see a boat coming ashore along the beach run along to help them ashore and be ready to go into the water to help if necessary. If you see an unexpected crew coming in broadside go into water to help turn it bow or stern into the waves to get blades out and flip over to carry shore as correct drill. Do not worry at the colour of the vests. It is every ones responsibility to see that crews and boats get ashore safely without injury.