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ANITA GETS HER RST!

I thought it would be a good idea to go and get my skippers ticket before the rush begins as the gap closes to April 2008. Suggesting this to my colleagues, friends and a couple of very regular customers, a group formed and we contacted Nikkulas Day of Skippers School.

Our group of eight met on a very overcast Sunday morning all ready for the big theoretical test. Nikkulas gave us a lesson and advised us to remember the information from the book. If we would be the types to be over cautious on the safety gear and take everything, this was not necessarily the answer or the way the workbook prints it is the answer you have to pick.

entire group had a history of boating so this certainly helped to pick the Skippers School Skipper 1 course. Peter (Will, from Bayswater Marines son) was under 18 and had to make sure the back of his work book was signed by his dad (or mum, Janelle), and with his consent he was allowed to sit his RST. Peter Kelleher was probably the most confident, and as a boat owner, Peter was eligible for the exemption but time had run out to follow it up but was keen to do the full practical exam anyway.

We all passed the theory and the eight of us split into two groups of four for the practical assessment of the RST that day, and the remainder of the group to be tested the following Saturday morning.

Michael Buba (my brother in law) Nicky Williams, and Natasha Chiappalone (two very good friends of mine) and I decided to continue despite the cold and drizzly conditions and so we grabbed a bite to eat for lunch before heading to the Bayswater ramp (Katanning St).

This was the scary part for me. I was particularly nervous about having to be tested on my boating skills and operate somebody else's boat (by the way - I don't own one and I have always used my father's boat, and his boat was undergoing some refurbishment on the interior). The thought of having to drive this beautiful new Venom 21'6" and a centre console which was also very different for me, was making me very scared.

Fortunately Nikkulas was very good and reviewed what we were to do during the test.

I thought it was best to confront my fears and volunteer to go first and so I set off down stream.

Task 1 - checking the vessel is safe. I have learnt from my own boating history that this task is very critical and could be a matter of life or death. You need to checklist all the following items every single trip: What is the condition of your vessel and equipment? Do you have the appropriate safety equipment on board? Is the vessel taking on water? Checking the engine gauges, monitoring of your passengers, being attentive to your location and aware of your position, the state of the sea and the all important knowledge of what speed you are allowed to do (or should do given the conditions). All those important questions that will make your trip a safe and uneventful (in a good way).

Task 2 - Checking your berthing equipment, basically put, checking that all your mooring ropes and hardware (the cleats, etc) are in good condition - yep "Nikkulas, please show me that your vessel is secure and your mooring lines and equipment are in good condition" (Ok perhaps I wasn't so formal, but you get the jist).

Task 3 - safety briefing. Buckle up boys, Anita is now at the helm. Well, not quite so simple as this, especially because your passengers may be new to boating altogether, or not quite familiar with your vessel, and really, just making sure everyone knows this is serious business and it is totally understood where the safety equipment is, and how and when to use it. Once again, a matter of life or death - so communicate well and make sure everyone understands.

Task 4 and 5 - Prestart checks and the Voyage plan. The assessment involves checking of your fuel, coolant and electrical system and safe starting of your engine. As Nikkulas' boat was fitted with a kill switch, one of the important things we had to remember was to ensure it was fitted and connected. Kill switches are something I have sold a lot of over the years, mainly to jet ski users, but have never used one in all the boats I have ever used.

The voyage plan - yes I stuffed this up and had to repeat the procedure until I got it right (luckily all practise runs!). Possibly because I had an audience and possibly because I have never called in before (except maybe once for a Marmion angling fishing

comp many years ago - but I'm sure it wasn't so difficult then). Good to learn what the real good boaties do.

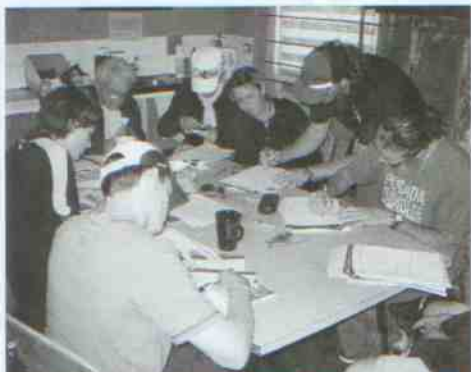
Task 8 - Transit (yes I have missed a few steps, because I'm doing it how I did it on the day). I must admit, on the river I did have difficulty finding objects to line up with, a big hairy tree with no real centre and an obscure building behind was all I could find and they really didn't pair well. Finally, a straight tree with a clear line and a light pole on top of a bridge - bingo! I'm now on course! (or maybe not. Nikkulas, perhaps only to make sure I really understood and didn't just get lucky made me do it again on the way back).

Task 9 Hold ON! - The controlled stop. This I have seen my dad do a thousand times before, and I'm sure I probably have enacted this procedure without even realising it had a name. This is to demonstrate at the speed of 5 knots, the ability to stop the vessel within two boat lengths, kind of handy when you are down at the Sky show with all the congestion in the water and you cannot alter your course - good time for a controlled stop.

Task 7 Person Overboard. Whilst I have experienced retrieving people overboard, it has never been in an emergency and I have never followed any sort of protocol except what I had witnessed and been shown by my father. To do this, we didn't use a real person though I did ask for volunteers - my crew were already cold and wet due to the persistent rain.

We did have beautiful flat winter water in the river, probably nothing like finding a person overboard in the rough open waters of the ocean. Nikkulas reminded several times the importance of assigning someone to keep visual watch on the person overboard at all times, because it was highly likely that the circumstances wouldn't be so favourable. He continued to stress the importance of retrieval approaching from a down wind or into the current depending on whichever is strongest. Most of the other requirements involved in this test were also very good to know and understand...

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The theory exam: Nikkulas Day is checking Natasha Chiappalone has filled in her application form correctly.



Nicky Williams and Natasha Chiappalone with Nikkulas Day. The girls are excited they have completed their RST.



Anita Lawrence at the helm. Michael Buba behind with Nikkulas Day wringing out the group's sweat.