



The carbon-fiber pole helps hold the Seascoopa open. Weighted line keeps the leading edge immersed underwater.

MOB Recovery Gear

The Seascoopa fine-tunes the parbuckle for heavy lifting in a man-overboard rescue.

Responding to our recent report on man-overboard recovery maneuvers (*PS* January 2010), several readers asked about the next stage of recovery, getting the victim on board. As difficult as it is to make contact with a person in the water (*PS* May 2008), getting the person back on board, particularly on today's large, high-freeboard cruisers, is no less daunting.

Over the years, *Practical Sailor* has examined this subject from many different angles. Our most recent detailed report on man-overboard recovery

gear appeared in the January 2006 issue, in which noted marine writer John Rousmaniere examined 12 different devices tested during the 2005 Crew Overboard Retrieval Symposium on San Francisco Bay.

The products tested in San Francisco could be generally categorized as ladders, slings, or nets. Although some devices were better suited for certain circumstances, our testers agreed that Lifesling2, a modified horseshoe buoy meant to be dragged behind the rescuing vessel, was the most versatile. It effectively served as a device for making first contact with the victim, and as a sling for hoisting them back into the boat. An improved (with reflecting tape) Lifesling3, which has the International Sailing Federation stamp of approval, is now available.

Once the victim is securely in the Lifesling and alongside, he can be winched or hauled—either manually or using 5:1 lifting tackle—back onto the boat. Halyards and toppinglifts are often suggested for lifting, but a cockpit

PS has tested the Lifesling2 on several occasions. A newer version, the Lifesling3, has reflective tape and other improvements.

winch is often the easiest to use.

One problem with sling-type devices such as the Lifesling is that the victim could suffer secondary injuries during a vertical lift. Risks of a vertical lift include: a semi-drowned person ingesting more water, a spinal-injury victim suffering further injury during the lift, and a potentially fatal loss of blood pressure (particularly in a victim suffering hypothermia). With care, these risks can be mitigated, but an effective horizontal lifting device could be a boon to rescuers.

Another drawback to the Lifesling and most other lifting devices tested at the 2005 symposium was that they were ineffective with unconscious victims. Even expert swimmers had trouble donning the Lifesling while they were wearing an inflatable lifevest. (The inflatable version of the Lifesling is very difficult to get on over an inflated PFD). Not only will the unconscious victim be more difficult to spot and make contact with, but hauling a limp 160-pound body aboard a modern slab-sided monohull in a seaway makes piano-moving look easy.

THE PARBUCKLE

Most of the symposium-tested devices that worked for unconscious victims were described as parbuckles. In its most basic form, a parbuckle is a rope that is looped under cargo (such as a barrel) for lifting. The sailor's version is usually an extra sail.

When used as a rescue parbuckle, two corners of the sail are fixed to points on the rail of the boat (stanchions, for example), and the third corner is attached to a halyard or topping lift. The sail is lowered into the water, and the victim is maneuvered into this makeshift net and then hoisted back aboard and "rolled" onto the deck.

In action, this type of rescue is not as simple or elegant as it appears on paper. A sail is not a net. It doesn't easily sink, and it tends to fill with water when it is lifted.



THE SEASCOOPA

Designed by Bob Wright, an experienced sailor and director of intensive care at St. Vincent's Public and Private Hospitals in Sydney, Australia, the Seascoopa is still in the development phase. Wright hopes it solves many of the problems of similar parbuckle-type devices. Most of the parbuckle-type devices evaluated in the San Francisco symposium were deemed "complicated," with the rescue times (the time from when contact was made, to getting the person on board) ranging from at least 2 minutes to as long as 10 minutes.

What sets the Seascoopa apart from the other devices is its compact, light-weight packaging and an interlocking three-piece carbon-fiber whisker pole that holds the trapezoid-shaped net out at right angles to the boat.


The ultimate goal of the device is to make it possible for a single person to safely secure and lift a much heavier person aboard with minimal effort. In addition to reducing some of the risks associated with a vertical lift, the Seascoopa aims to simplify making contact with the victim. Because it can be employed while the vessel is slowly making way, the recovery involves less stationary bobbing, when the boat is at the mercy of wind and waves. (An underway recovery, raises other risks, discussed later.)

CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN

The Seascoopa's design and construction details show that a lot of thought and testing has gone into the device. The yacht Seascoopa model that *PS* tested was developed from an earlier model designed for small rescue RIBs. The inflatable boat Seascoopas are now being marketed for rescue craft in Australia.

The net itself is made of heavy-duty polypropylene, reinforced at the edges with heavy-duty PVC canvas. The whis-

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The victim can be rolled onto the deck. Ideally, the lower lifelines would be loosened and raised.

MOB DEVICE	PRICE	TYPE	RATINGS			
			CONSTRUCTION	EASE OF INSTALL	EASE OF USE*	UNCONSCIOUS RECOVERY
SEASCOOPA	NA	Parbuckle	Good	Good	Fair	Good
LIFESLING2 	\$100	Horseshoe/sling	Good	Excellent	Good	Poor
 Recommended			*Includes making contact and recovery.			

ker pole is an interlocking carbon-fiber pole joined by a bungee. High-quality stainless steel hardware and cordage is used to secure the net to the boat. Polypropylene handholds are positioned on the perimeter and inside net, and polypropylene rope at the leading edge has a weighted core to keep the rescue net underwater while it is being dragged.

The net, three-piece whisker pole, and all the necessary guys and hardware pack into a heavy-duty PVC trifold bag measuring 36 x 6 x 12 inches and weighing 25 pounds. The bag is meant to fit in the cockpit locker of a cruising boat.

To deploy the Seascoopa from the fully packed configuration, you unfold the bag, attach the lifting line (usually a topping lift or spinnaker halyard) to the lifting strop at the "head" of the Seascoopa. You must also attach the two corners of the Seascoopa to stanchions or fixed points on the boat, assemble the whisker pole, and secure the foreguy. The whisker pole must be fixed to a ring at the lifting strop a certain way, depending on the side of the boat used for rescue. Usually this is determined in advance, and the pole is pre-attached accordingly.

Although a rescuer could deploy the Seascoopa from this packed configuration in an emergency, doing so quickly and effectively would require lots of

practice and preparation, and preferably, extra crew. After several practice runs, it took our testers at least 3 minutes to convert the Seascoopa from stowed bag to a deployed net, too long in our opinion.

TEST RUNS

A more useful approach would be to keep the Seascoopa device in the "ready" mode. *PS* used this setup during on-the-water tests. In this configuration, the whisker pole is pre-assembled, lifting lines and foreguy are pre-set, and the Seascoopa is repacked in its bag. This time, however, the bag is unfolded to its full 8.5-foot length and stowed along the rail of the boat. Although the bag can be well secured in this location, it would likely take a thumping on a monohull with low freeboard going to windward on a long, wet beat.

To deploy, you open the Velcro closure at the bag's center to reveal the lifting strop and foreguy. Attach a halyard to the lifting strop and hoist to a preset height. This causes the bag to burst fully open, freeing the pole and allowing you to set the foreguy. In this configuration, deploying was accomplished in less than a minute. Keeping

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Shedding Light on Safety

A recent ocean race—aboard a Cape Dory 25 sans lifelines in 30- to 40-knot winds and 5- to 10-foot seas—presented a good opportunity to sea-trial Wichard's Lyf' Safe jackline kit.

Wichard Inc., which is based in France and has an office in Vermont, has been making marine hardware and accessories for more than 30 years. Its Lyf' Safe kit offers a ready-to-go jackline setup and comes with everything needed to install the system. What sets the Lyf' Safe apart from standard jacklines is its reflective polyester webbing and glow-in-the-dark adjuster casings, both of which make the setup more visible on a dark deck and easier to locate when you need to clip in in a hurry at night.

Testers found the system installation easy, fast, and straightforward. The kit includes two lengths of 1-inch-wide webbing (each with one looped and one free end) that can be fitted onto a variety of deck fittings, including padeyes, cleats, and stanchions. (For more on jack-

lines and their proper setup, check out "Hooked Up," *PS* April 2007.)

The jacklines can be tailored to the desired length by sliding the forged stainless adjusters. No cutting is necessary, so the jacklines can easily be used on multiple boats in a similar size range. Two plastic, photoluminescent casings are supplied as covers for the metal adjusters. Testers found that these made it easy to spot the end of the line at night, and they also kept the jacklines from being accidentally loosened or released.

Lyf' Safe kits are available in lengths ranging from 27 feet (\$150) to 55 feet (\$295). (We found them for sale at www.defender.com.) Basic 30-foot polyester jacklines cost about \$60, considerably less than the Lyf' Safe, but they lack adjusting hardware, built-in reflective qualities, and anti-abrasion sides. ▲

**CONTACT: WICHARD, 401/683-5055,
www.wichard-usa.com**



Wichard's Lyf' Safe jacklines feature a reflective stripe that runs the length of the webbing. Plastic casings (inset) glow and keep adjusters from accidentally sliding.

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a spare halyard attached to the Seascoop in the "ready" mode would reduce the setup time by several seconds.

RECOVERY

To evaluate performance, *PS* practiced recovery from a 46-foot catamaran in calm seas. With its wide sidedecks, high freeboard, and level deck, the Dolphin 440 was a good candidate for the Seascoop. In these very benign conditions, the Seascoop worked just as it was designed. Like a human trawl net, it scooped the "victim" up at about 1.5 knots.

The most challenging elements were at the start of the recovery, when the rescue boat was coming alongside the victim, and at the end, when testers needed to "roll" her under the lifeline.

Like any man-overboard drill, this is clearly a routine that would need to be practiced repeatedly to maximize the chances of success.

CONCLUSION

Until further testing in more rigorous conditions, we have to withhold judgment on this product. Testers also noted some minor details that could be improved: More rugged purpose-made whisker pole and fittings are in order; the hull-attachment snap-hooks should be the locking type and have bigger inside diameters to fit around stanchions; and the 5:1 block and tackle used to tension the Seascoop alongside the boat should be longer.

If you are seriously concerned about being able to bring your unconscious shipmate back on board without assistance, watch as this product evolves. In our view, it would need to be kept "at the ready" to be useful, not stowed in a locker. Even in "ready mode," keeping sight of the victim during deployment is a stumbling block for short-handed crews. Also, scooping up the victim requires precise driving and hours of practice. Without practice, this is simply gear taking up space.

We can see how this device might appeal to designated "rescue boats" in a rally or a race, or even to a high-rolling cruiser with plenty of locker space and a well-trained crew. However, it is not something we can recommend without further testing. In our view, the best man-overboard antidote is a good-quality tether and harness system, and failing that a well-practiced routine using a Lifesling. In the meantime, we'll keep watching as the Seascoop evolves and hunt for others that hope to deal with the nightmare scenario: a large unconscious, or semi-conscious person in the water.

Check out the video of our Seascoop sea trial at www.insidepracticalsailor.com. Manufacturer videos are also posted on the Seascoop website. ▲

CONTACT

SEASCOOPA,
www.seascoopa.net