

Risk Assessment – Cruiser Skills Sail (Southampton Water) and Return to St Denys

Activity: skills sharing : short sail in Southampton Water and return to St Denys

Location: St Denys → Itchen River mouth → Southampton Water (training area) → return

Vessel: Drascombe Lugger / Coaster or other small cruisers

Activity Type: Skipped Session (skills-focused; novice cruiser sailors)

Date last reviewed: 23 January 2026

Assessor: James Wardle

Reviewed by:

Review due: January 2027

Scope and Context

This risk assessment covers a supervised cruiser sailing session leaving St Denys, sailing into Southampton Water to practise core cruiser sailing skills, and returning to the club.

The focus is on teaching new cruiser sailors the basics (role briefing, sail handling, steering, lookout, collision avoidance awareness, reefing, simple navigation, and emergency procedures). The session is not a formal RYA course, but it does involve instruction and task-based manoeuvres.

Southampton Water is a busy commercial waterway with strong tidal influence and wash from large vessels. Training must be delivered conservatively, prioritising safety, group control, and appropriate conditions.

Additional Controls (Practice session)

- Skipper: competent cruiser skipper appointed with clear authority; briefing that instructions must be followed immediately.
- Crew briefing: safety briefing before departure (lifejackets, boom safety, man overboard, use of lines, moving around deck, cold/wet exposure).
- Role allocation: novice crew given clear tasks one at a time (e.g., fender handling, sheets, halyards) with supervision; no overload.
- Maneuvers explained and practiced in low-risk water (away from shipping lanes and confined areas).

- Lifejackets mandatory for all; children (if any) remain seated/in cockpit and are supervised by parent/guardian at all times.
- High tide planning preferred to reduce grounding risk on return and maximise clearance at the St Denys rail bridge.
- Weather limits: avoid strong winds, gusty conditions, poor visibility, and conditions requiring complex sail plans for novices.
- Reef early policy: if in doubt, reef early before leaving sheltered water; avoid leaving it too late.
- Commercial traffic awareness: avoid main channel; keep lookout; cross any traffic lanes at 90° only when safe; be prepared for significant wash.
- Communications: VHF (where carried) monitoring Ch 12/16; mobiles in waterproof cases; shore contact informed of plan and ETA.
- Engine/auxiliary readiness: check engine (if fitted) before departure; oars/paddles ready for backup; anchor ready for emergency stop.

Risk Assessment Table

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk	Control Measures	Risk Level	Further Actions
Inexperienced crew (teaching session)	All crew	Poor boat handling, slow reactions, errors under pressure	Skipper retains control of helm and key decisions. Teach in calm water. One task at a time. Clear commands. Lifejackets mandatory. Stop teaching if safety margin reduces.	Medium	Limit group size; add assistant skipper if available
Commercial shipping traffic and large wash	All on board	Collision risk; destabilising wash; injury	Stay out of main channel. Maintain lookout. Cross at 90° only when safe. Prepare crew for wash (sit down, hold on). Use VHF and AIS where available.	High	Move training area further inshore if busy
Strong tidal flow	All on board	Loss of control; difficulty returning; grounding	Plan with tide tables. Maintain steerageway. Use engine/aux propulsion if needed. Set conservative return time.	Medium	Abort early if progress slow
Low bridge clearance (St Denys rail bridge)	All on board	Rig impact / damage	Check clearance at planned tide. Lower mast before bridge where required. Go slow and controlled.	Medium	Do not proceed if unsure of clearance
Weather change / squalls / reduced visibility	All on board	Reduced control; cold stress; navigational error	Check forecast. Carry waterproofs and warm layers. Reef early. Keep session short. Return if visibility reduces or wind increases.	Medium	Use alternate sheltered area or cancel
Man overboard (MOB) during manoeuvres	Individual overboard	Drowning, hypothermia	Lifejackets mandatory. MOB briefing and roles. Avoid high-risk deck movement. Keep cockpit tidy. Practise MOB talk-through at low speed.	Medium-High	Ensure throwline/ladder recovery plan
Boom strike / line handling injury	Crew (novices)	Impact injury, rope burns	Boom awareness briefing. Controlled tacks/gybes. Keep hands clear of blocks. Gloves recommended. Skipper to call manoeuvres clearly.	Medium	Use preventer where appropriate
Engine failure (if	All on board	Drift into traffic or	Pre-departure engine check. Carry spare fuel if	Medium	Abort if engine

fitted) / loss of propulsion		shallows	applicable. Oars ready. Anchor prepared for emergency stop.		unreliable
Navigation errors / entering restricted areas	All on board	Collision risk, grounding	Simple planned route and training area. Skipper manages nav. Use chart/GPS/Navionics. Regular position checks and visual references.	Low-Medium	Keep training close to known marks
Fatigue / cold / seasickness	Crew	Reduced coordination and judgement	Short session (<2 hrs). Water and snacks. Encourage communication. Keep crew warm/dry. Return early if anyone unwell.	Low-Medium	Rotate tasks; reduce manoeuvres

General Notes

- This session is skills-focused and should be run conservatively: safety takes priority over achieving training objectives.
- The skipper may end the session early if commercial traffic, weather, or crew capability reduces the safety margin.
- Participants should be encouraged to ask questions, but must follow instructions promptly during manoeuvres.
- This risk assessment should be reviewed annually or after any incident/near miss.