

RFD Plays a Hand in Ocean Yacht Rescue

Australian ocean racing yacht *Loki* came to grief during foul weather off the coast of Italy with the entire crew forced to abandon the 18 metre yacht after complete rudder failure during a heavy ocean squall. Following radio



contact with coastal authorities, an RFD supplied ACR GlobalFix 406 EPIRB was activated before an Italian Air Force Sikorsky helicopter was deployed to rescue the 16 man crew.

Loki was leading at the half way point of the 606 nautical mile Rolex Middle Sea Race and sailing in 35 knots winds when the skipper Cameron Miles felt a sudden bang. Looking back to see the yacht's rudder floating away in the wake, Cameron and crew lost all steering capabilities and, as the yacht drifted closer to shore, a 'pan pan' distress call was put out to local authorities for help.



"We had intermittent radio contact with local Italian rescue authorities and decided to activate one of our GlobalFix 406 EPIRBs as a precaution," said *Loki*'s owner Stephen Ainsworth.

"We lost the rudder around 5:15pm and deployed a sea drogue to try and slow our progress and assist with steerage. After several hours of radio contact, a

rescue tow boat was deployed but soon turned back because of the weather. A second rescue boat finally arrived but could only stand by to assist in the event of a chopper rescue.”

The treacherous conditions flawed any rescue attempt as crashing waves were hitting the boat while the yacht swayed violently preventing both the competitor mini-maxi *Atlanta II* and the Italian rescue craft from getting close enough to secure tow ropes. As the rugged coastline drew near, the decision was made to bale out the crew into two 8-man RFD LifeGuard life rafts.

“We had a call at approximately 8:45pm stating a chopper was on standby should we wish to abandon the boat. I accepted the offer and the chopper arrived at 9:30 to begin the rescue,” said Stephen.



“We deployed the first life raft and sent the first half of the crew out to be winched into the chopper. The remaining crew tried desperately for an hour to fashion a makeshift rudder from our bunk materials, but this also failed. In a last ditch attempt to save the yacht, just before the second group left, a long anchor was deployed which managed to halt the yacht’s progress.”

The 16 man crew eventually made it back to shore after midnight and were put up in a local hotel while the storm continued to gather momentum outside. Remarkably the yacht was still anchored when Stephen Ainsworth and Cameron Miles rose early the next day to check. Unfortunately the foul weather prevented any salvage attempt and the yacht eventually broke her hold to then drift onto the nearby shore.

“The yacht was a complete write off and is now a matter for the insurance company,” said Stephen.

“Thankfully all our crew were unharmed and all our equipment worked. I received confirmation that our EPIRB distress signal was detected soon after activation by AMSA in Australia so it is a comforting thought to know the gear we had onboard performed when needed.”

Stephen and his team have not let this experience dampen their yacht racing enthusiasm and aim to develop another vessel in time for next year’s race.

Along with a host of high tech navigational equipment and communication electrics, *Loki* was also equipped with a range of safety devices including two RFD supplied ACR GlobalFix 406MHz EPIRB Cat 2 units with built-in GPS data and two 8 man RFD LifeGuard ISAF life rafts.

RFD is a world leading supplier of marine safety products and inflatable watercraft marketed under a range of brand names. Some of these brands include Aquapro inflatable boats, Plastimo boating equipment, ACR electronics and Aquaglide water sport products.

Beginning in 1920, RFD is primarily involved in the supply and service of marine, fire, life support and gas control equipment.

For all information concerning supply and pricing of individual products within the broad range, please contact your regional RFD branch office.

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Editor's Further Note

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