

MAN OVERBOARD RETURN AND RECOVERY

A summary of the current thinking about MOB Return and Recovery

Every Man Overboard (MOB) incident is different, but some principles still hold. Add these skills to your seamanship and you will have a better chance of recovering an MOB.

The key principles: FIRST, drop floatation to help the MOB and mark the spot. SECOND, quickly stop the boat near the MOB. THIRD, return the boat in a controlled manner, being careful you do not hit the MOB with the boat. FINALLY, pick up the MOB with a LifeSling (or other means).

It is important that you practice a variety of MOB maneuvers with your own crew aboard your own boat, as each boat is different. Practice the principles, use your seamanship skills, and you can tailor your return and recovery for the specific conditions.



UPWIND QUICK STOP, USING A LIFESLING RECOVERY

POSITION 1: Shout “Man Overboard!” Pull the pin on the MOM 8; throw other flotation. Assign one crew as “Pointer”, who shouts the bearing and range to the MOB continuously. The helmsman or navigator shall push the “MOB button” for five seconds. Begin your quick stop by having the helmsman shout “Hold on! Tacking!”

POSITION 2: Tack the boat. In the tack, the jib sheet is not released, nor is the main. With a backed jib the boat “heaves to”, and slows and stays close to the MOB—the desirable position. Start the engine, but keep it in neutral (check for lines in the water before putting it in gear!).

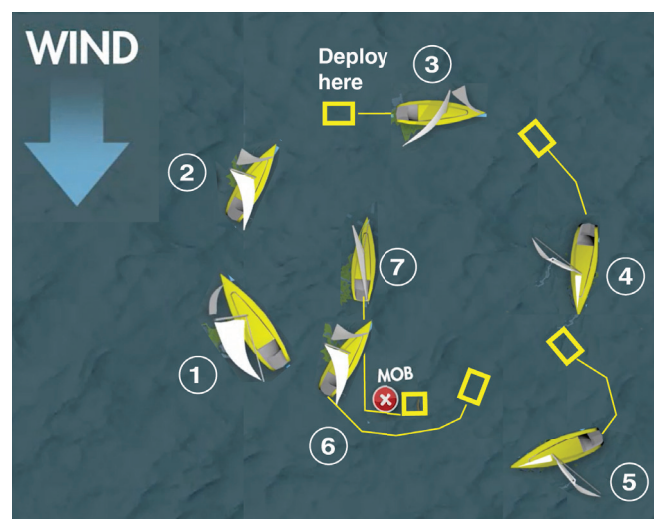
POSITION 3: Launch the LifeSling. As soon as the crew on deck is prepared, begin to bear off, staying about 2-4 lengths from MOB. Keep the jib cleated and backed.

POSITION 4: Bear off to a dead run, and gybe the main.

POSITION 5: When the boat is 1-1.5 boat lengths below the MOB, the helmsman luffs toward the MOB, onto a close reach,

using the engine as needed. (The Pointer should move forward to the mast to keep MOB in sight and to guide the helmsman). Begin to luff and circle the MOB staying away from them; keep the boat from hitting the MOB.

POSITION 6: Circle the MOB “water skier pickup style”, without touching the sheets insofar as possible. Once the MOB makes contact with the floating line, free sheets to stop the boat immediately; you don’t want to pull the MOB with the boat at speed. The MOB should slip the sling part of the Lifesling over their head and under their armpits.



POSITION 7: Douse, furl or flog all sails. Pull the MOB to amidships where you can secure the MOB next to the boat. Attach a halyard to the Lifesling bridle (or a knot you tied about 12 feet above the bridle). Hoist the MOB on deck.

If you are NOT using the Lifesling for a pickup, then:

In POSITION 4: Strike or furl the jib on the run. (n.b. some boats may need to leave it up for control.)

In POSITION 6: Decide whether to pick up the MOB on the windward or leeward side and tell your crew. Foredeck readies the throw bag. Trim and ease the mainsail to control speed, and/or use the engine engaged to control boat speed (1-2 knots maximum as your bow passes the MOB).

POSITION 7: As your bow passes MOB, toss the throw bag; the MOB will be pulled in amidships as they move aft. Stop the boat. Lower the Lifesling to MOB and with a halyard on the Lifesling bridle (or a knot on the line above the bridle), hoist the MOB on deck. Or, grapple the MOB aboard (less recommended as you may lose contact with MOB)



QUICK STOP RECOVERY WHEN SAILING DOWNWIND

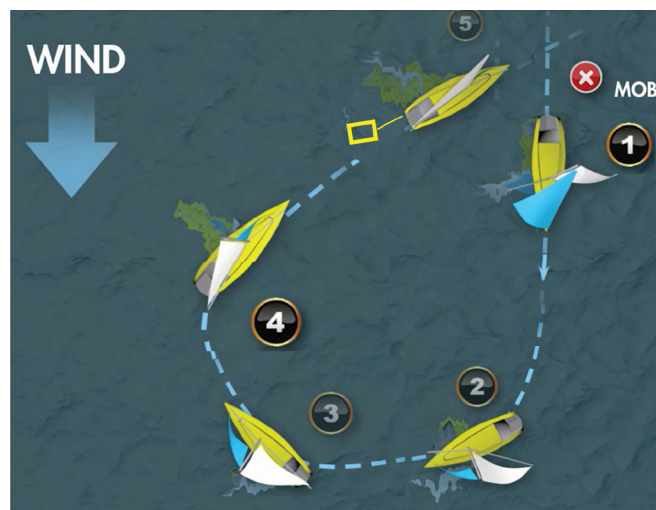
POSITION 1: Shout “Man Overboard!” Pull the pin on the MOM. Throw flotation. Hit the MOB button. Assign the “Pointer”. The helmsman shouts: “Hold on! Coming up!”

POSITION 2: On boats with poles: Ease pole to headstay, trim foreguy. On both pole and sprit boats: do not let the tack run. The trimmer should give a quick luff to the spinnaker sheet to unload the sail. Crew holds on as helmsman luffs up until the spinnaker is flying just off the spreaders.

POSITION 3: Quickly ease the spinnaker halyard, assuring there are no jams! Pull the spinnaker sheet tight as the crew grabs the foot of the chute and pulls it on deck. Control it with the guy until you can stuff it below.

POSITION 4: Start the engine and keep it in neutral; check for lines in the water. Tack up towards MOB using the engine to gain speed and steerage.

FOLLOW POSITIONS 5, 6 & 7 as in the previous recovery — Upwind Quick Stop Return.



PRACTICE THESE SKILLS ON YOUR BOAT WITH YOUR CREW IN DIFFERENT CONDITIONS—ONLY THEN YOU WILL BUILD YOUR SKILLS

MORE INFORMATION: LIFESLING, DOWNWIND QUICK STOP

The Lifesling is a floating sling, connected by a bridle to a long, yellow, floating line.

- We recommend you tie a figure-8 or other loop knot about 12 to 20 feet above the sling's bridle. This will let you secure the MOB to a cleat and at the same time have a length of line on which to clip the halyard.
- Also, add a water-activated light on the sling if you will be sailing at night.

The Lifesling is required for all coastal and ocean races, and it is a “must-have” for any short-handed crew, double-handers, or cruisers. Just a few advantages include: The Lifesling does not require a precise, close approach; once the MOB is in the Lifesling, you won't lose contact with them; and it is easier to get the MOB aboard if they are in the sling. Fully crewed race boats should practice recoveries with and without a Lifesling.

Shorthanded and cruising crew should focus on Lifesling recoveries.

Use your engine appropriately to provide critical maneuverability during a recovery. The racing rules allow this.

If the MOB is unconscious or weak, the MOB will not be able to grab and secure the Lifesling. If the MOB appears compromised once close aboard, a fully-crewed boat may lower a tethered “Rescue Crew” in a bosun's chair or foredeck harness by halyard to water level as you come alongside the MOB. This crew can clip onto the MOB and then you hoist both aboard.

For Downwind Recoveries in heavy air. Depending on your boat's characteristics, a downwind Quick Stop in heavy air (over 25 knots more or less) could risk serious damage or injury, delaying the return

to the MOB. Each boat and crew must establish their own threshold of wind and waves. Before these takedowns (both routine and emergency), we recommend an extra sheet be rigged to the clew and over the boom for a “letterbox” takedown.

GO TO THESE KEY RESOURCES

- US Sailing Safety at Sea Courses
www.ussailing.org/education/adult/safety-at-sea-courses-2022
- From Storm Trysail Foundation
– Man Overboard Recovery
[www.YouTube.com/Practical MOB Recovery](http://www.YouTube.com/Practical%20MOB%20Recovery)
– Advances in MOB Recovery
[www.YouTube.com/Advances in MOB Recovery 2021](http://www.YouTube.com/Advances%20in%20MOB%20Recovery%202021)
- UK Sailmakers letterbox video
[www.YouTube.com/The Letter Box Takedown](http://www.YouTube.com/The%20Letter%20Box%20Takedown)