

DART TALES



Lifeboats

NEWS FROM THE RNLI LIFEBOAT TEAM IN DARTMOUTH

DART LIFEBOATS WORKING AT HIGH SPEED

Lifeboats are designed to go fast but using this speed comes with challenges. As a by-stander it can sometimes be hard to distinguish exactly what we are up to as all you can see and hear is a lifeboat operating at high speed where others are not allowed to do so.

At Dart Lifeboat Station we have two inshore lifeboats. The larger B-Class Atlantic 75 has a top speed of 32knots and the smaller D-Class inflatable can reach 25knots.

There are three main reasons why you will see our highly trained helms & crews working at high speed in both our lifeboats;

SHOUTS – how fast we proceed depends on the severity of the incident we have been tasked to. When there is an immediate threat to life we will go as fast as it is safe to do so; but our number one priority is always the safety of the crew on the lifeboat and also those around us.

Some of the shouts we attend are normal run-of-the-mill calls to tow vessels back into the harbour. Even these may require us to proceed as quickly and as safely as possible as the vessel and its occupants may be drifting into danger or be in danger of capsizing.

ATLANTIC 75'S BALLAST TANK

– the design of the Atlantic class lifeboat means that, due to its solid hull, seating and larger engines, we are able to go at high speed in bad weather. To help us to do this safely, and to minimise the risk of capsizing,

the lifeboat is fitted with a 200litre ballast tank. This tank is filled using a water scoop located between the engines. When deployed the water scoop will force water from the stern into the bow ballast tank. When full, the ballast tank keeps the



Photo by Riki Bannister

“If we are operating at high speed there is a good reason for it.”

bow of the lifeboat down and helps us to punch through the waves, rather than allowing the bow to rise and be caught by wind or waves. Unfortunately we are unable to keep the ballast tank full due to our berthing arrangements on a floating dock; hence we need to fill it each time we proceed to sea.

As many will know, one of the roughest areas we deal with is at the mouth of the Dart, between the Castles. When you get the wind over the tide it results in a very steep and short sea there. This means that we need to have our ballast tank full before we enter this area. To achieve this we need to push the lifeboat up to her top speed as we clear the Lower Ferry. This gives enough time to fill the tank prior to entering the area of rougher sea. We need to fill this tank,

even when we are training, to ensure the safety of the crew and the boat.

TRAINING – In order to prepare our crews for the challenging conditions they often have to face, we need to practice operating at high speed in calm and controlled conditions. Giving our crews the opportunity to train at speed is essential in not only aiding us to get to a casualty quickly but to also keep the crew on the lifeboat as safe as possible, along with anyone else on the water.

Our helms are subjected to very rigorous training and assessments prior to being allowed to take command of our lifeboat on shouts. During this training and assessment period they are tested and tested again on the use of safe speed.

We will always do our best to cause as little disruption to the wider public around us when we are out on the lifeboats. At the Harbour master's request, when the larger lifeboat is operating at speed within the harbour area or when on a shout you will see the blue strobe light flashing. Our smaller D-Class lifeboat isn't fitted with a blue light therefore you may just see her proceeding at speed. He has given us permission to proceed as described above under proscribed conditions.

We appreciate there will always be times when people are unsure what we are up to but hopefully this article has assured you that if we are operating at high speed there is a good reason for it.

Richard Eggleton. RNLI Dart Training Co-ordinator.

D 702 SPIRIT OF THE DART.

D702 was donated by the late Mike Felton, Chairman of Cater-food. She was launched on service 327 times. Her first two launches were on the day of her Naming Ceremony, 7 August 2008.

D702, and her replacements when she was away from Dartmouth being serviced, launched 375 times between 24 November 2007 and 10 July 2019. The RNLI volunteers used the Dart D class lifeboat to rescue 644 people and saved 12 lives. The area covered by any particular launch is decided by the Deputy Launch Authority and the helm of the lifeboat. As well as shouts to go up the Dart to Totnes and beyond, in her time the *Spirit of the Dart* has been

called to a yacht which claimed she was three miles offshore but turned out to be seven. On another occasion a motor boat called for assistance off Beesands and was swept round Start Point by the tide. On these last two occasions D702 reached the casualty and then requested assistance from our flank stations at Torbay and Salcombe

respectively.

It is RNLI policy to replace their inflatable lifeboats after 10 or 11 years depending on their use. RNLI Dart has been the second busiest station with only one lifeboat so she certainly qualifies. The RNLI has not yet decided on how she will be used in future. All weather lifeboats often have an offshore mooring a short distance from the lifeboat berth which is used in severe weather. The crew are taken out to their vessel on a "Boarding boat" and she might become one of those. We are extremely fortunate that the Fuller family, who once lived in Dartmouth, have donated the money for a new D class lifeboat D838 in memory of Mrs Fuller's aunt.



Spirit of the Dart whilst on exercise in Start Bay.
Photo by John Fenton

News, details of launches, photographs and videos can be found on the Dart station website. www.dartlifeboat.org.uk or the station Facebook page www.facebook.com/dartnllifeboat

John Fenton, RNLI Dart Lifeboat Press Officer & Education Volunteer



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