

When we made a decision that we wanted to drive a car we were conscious of the fact that we were going to be tested on our knowledge of the Highway Code as well as on our practical ability to actually drive, we therefore took the trouble to learn to drive and studied the Highway Code. It is a little surprising therefore that the British are allowed to go to sea in almost any size of vessel, often in waters that are congested with commercial traffic, without having shown to anyone that they can skipper a boat effectively and that they have a basic knowledge of the 'Rules of the Road'.

You may well say that this is one of our last freedoms. The Royal Yachting Association believes that the present voluntary system of learning and being tested is the best one for the British. Brits don't like being told that they **must** do something; we are more enthusiastic and take more trouble to learn if we feel that we have volunteered. But there is a very small minority who just don't care and go to sea with absolutely no knowledge whatsoever, thus endangering the lives of their friends, relatives, other people on the water and sometimes the people who have to go out and rescue them.



The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea were written so that we can be completely clear as to what our obligations are to other vessels at sea, they are written very clearly and precisely so as to be totally unambiguous. Basically motor vessels, and this of course includes sailing vessels when they are under motor, should give way to other vessels that are approaching from their starboard side. When in a 'head on' situation both vessels should turn to starboard so as to pass port to port. When a vessel is overtaking another vessel the overtaking vessel should keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken.

There are just two situations that you can be in when there is a risk of collision. You will be either 'the stand on vessel' or 'the give way vessel'. There are no circumstances when you can look upon yourself as having 'the right of way'.

In a situation where you are 'the stand on vessel' you are expected to maintain your course and speed, however if the other vessel who falls into the category of 'give way vessel' does not give way as required by the rules then you must take action to avoid collision. This action will inevitably take place when you are fairly close to the other vessel and should be in the form of a manoeuvre rather than just an alteration of course. The manoeuvre that I would recommend would be a 180 degree turn away from the vessel and to maintain that course until the other vessel is clear.

At first when we look at collision regulations written out in full it is easy to feel a bit daunted by their apparent complexities, however they can be reduced to a few basic rules. We all know that motor vessels should give way to sailing vessels, however in confined and shallow waters such as the Solent it is clearly out of the question to expect very large commercial vessels to give

## To give way or not to give way?

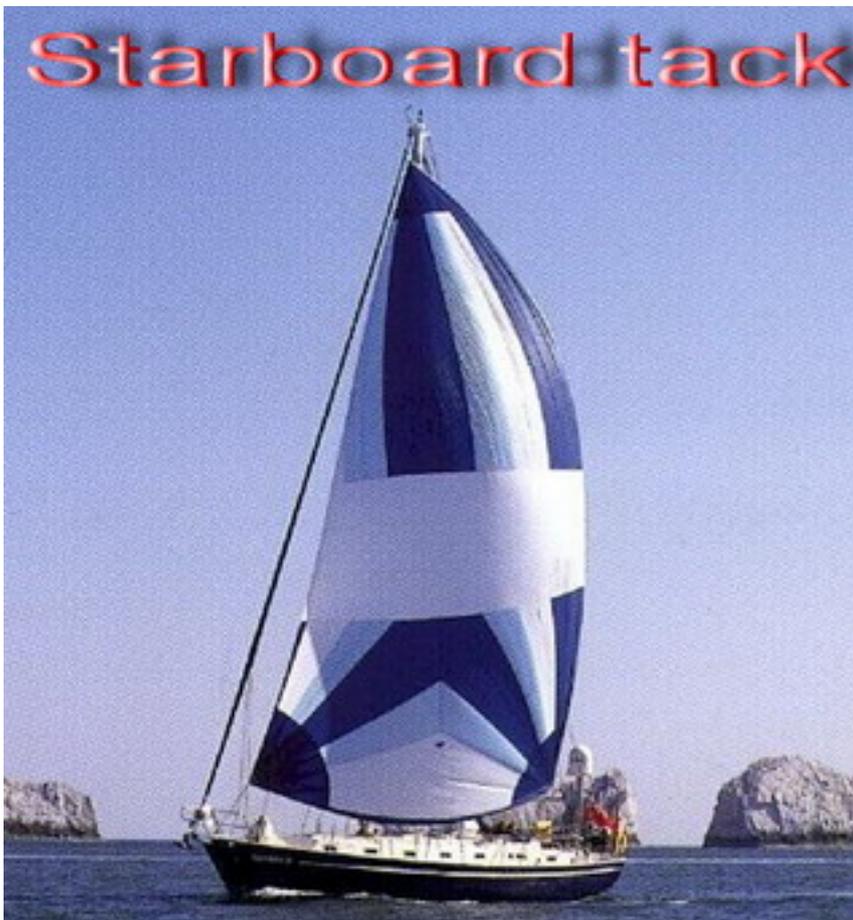
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way to sailing vessels, it therefore makes sense for sailing vessels to keep out of their way. However out in the middle of the English channel I would expect even very large ships to give way to sailing vessels and in most cases they do. It is in this situation that I have been on 'both sides of the fence'.

On the bridge of a ship the radar will be in use even in good visibility. The crew that are on watch will constantly monitor the radar which will keep them informed as to which vessels shown on the screen they are likely to collide with, if both vessels maintain their course and speed. Motor vessels and ships that are approaching from the starboard side of the ship will be 'stand on' vessels as will all vessels under sail approaching from any direction other than from astern. Adjustments will be made to the course and possibly the speed of the ship to avoid collision with any 'stand on' vessel, often this adjustment will be fairly small because the crew will be able to tell from the radar as soon as they have altered course or speed sufficiently to avoid collision.

Many inexperienced motor cruiser and yacht skippers have said to me that even if the other vessel is 'the give way' vessel, if it is bigger and made of steel they will give way to it. You can see that if you were the skipper of a ship in this instance it would be infuriating if a 'stand on' vessel were to alter course for you when you had just made the decision to 'give way' to him. Not only is it infuriating for him, but it also very dangerous because if they both alter course to pass astern of each other they will alter course directly into each other.



Sailing vessels have an additional set of rules in order to avoid the possibility of collision with

each other. These rules are also very straight forward and are as follows: A yacht that has the wind coming from its starboard side is the 'stand on' vessel when approaching a vessel that has the wind coming from its port side which is the 'give way' vessel. If both vessels have the wind coming from the same side, then the vessel that is up-wind of the other vessel is the 'give way' vessel. It is sometimes difficult when a yacht has the wind coming from almost directly astern to tell which side of the yacht the wind is coming from, in such a situation the wind is deemed to be coming from the opposite side to which the main boom is being carried.

The RYA does not plan to introduce mandatory licenses for British skippers of recreational craft. The Portuguese authorities however do require that Portuguese skippers and skippers of other nationalities do have a license to operate either a motor cruiser or a yacht in Portuguese waters and have on occasions fined skippers who did not have one. The RYA therefore issues an International Certificate of Competence, which is recognized by the Portuguese authorities. In order to qualify for the ICC you either have to have an RYA course completion certificate at Day Skipper level or higher, or you can take a test that will last for about four hours. In the ICC test you will be tested on your knowledge of 'Collision Regulations', you will also be required to demonstrate that you are a competent navigator at sea and that your boat handling both at sea and in a marina is effective and safe. The syllabus for the ICC test can be found on my web site under ICC/RYA. If you don't have access to a computer and would like to have a paper copy of the ICC syllabus, please telephone me and I will send you one.