

There Are Rules to Race By ... and Rules to Live By

A singlehander sounds off on lifelines, nav lights, and the all-important grab bag.

Although *Wildflower* carries all the safety equipment required by the Singlehanded TransPac (SHTP) rules, I have developed supplemental systems over the years. In some cases, my approach runs contrary to *Practical Sailor's* advice or existing regulations, but in my view, these steps keep me alive and do not put others at risk. They are published here for the purposes of discussion, NOT as perfect advice.

Leading the list are *Wildflower's* extra high, 28-inch lifelines. The SHTP rules require a minimum of 18-inch-tall lifelines for boats under 28 feet, and 24 inches tall for boats greater in length. These knee-high lifelines can actually trip a crew over the side.

Coated wire lifelines are not permitted under International Sailing Federation offshore safety standards, however, they are legal for the SHTP. *Wildflower* carries 7/32-inch stainless-steel-wire lifelines that are encased in plastic coating, increasing their diameter to a user-friendly 5/16-inch. I find these safer than the small-diameter lines allowed by ISAF. (*PS* prefers uncoated wire for ease of inspection, though not of diameters less than 3/16-inch.)

Although a xenon masthead strobe light is required for SHTP, *Wildflower* also carries an amber strobe mounted



Skip Allan's ditch kit includes communication gear, emergency signals, tools for navigating, and at least four days' worth of food and water rations.

Photos by Skip Allan (top); Sherry McKillop (below)

atop a 10-foot fiberglass pole off the stern. The light highlights the sails in a pulsing glow without blinding the skipper. It has been argued that this violates International Colregs. However, my boat is of little or no danger to freighters, and they are a very real threat to me. It takes a 30-knot ship less than four minutes to cover the two miles that a standard ISAF-approved running light is visible. That is not enough time for a ship to change course for a small boat!

I call attention to Colregs Rule 34, paragraph (d): "When vessels in sight of one another are approaching each other and from any cause either vessel fails to understand the intentions or actions of the other, or is in doubt whether sufficient action is being taken by the other to avoid collision, the vessel in doubt shall immediately indicate such doubt by giving at least five short and rapid blasts on the whistle. Such signal may be supplemented by a light signal of at least five short and rapid flashes."

Given current watchstanding insuffi-

ciencies on large commercial vessels, I am ALWAYS in doubt whether ships are taking sufficient action to avoid collision. It would be a stretch to say my amber light could be mistaken for another nav light. (*PS* invites discussion on this point, but advocates a stricter interpretation of the Colregs. In this case, a high-visibility tri-color light.)

In addition to a safety harness and tether, SHTP rules require 4,500-pound breaking-strength jacklines, secured port and starboard. I prefer a tether that is half the boat's length, and attached amidships, so that any part of the boat can be reached without unhooking, even when going below.

Finally, all the gear I would need in an abandon-ship scenario, including a four-person life raft packed in a valise, is stored adjacent to the companionway and can be ready for launching in less than 15 seconds. This gear (see photo above) includes survival rations, signaling gear, and communication equipment packed in a "ditch bag."

—S.A.



For a "short leash" Allan sometimes loops a 6-foot tether through the jackline. Others avoid this technique as it can increase the risk of tether chafe.