



The 2007 Safety All-Stars

Life rafts, harnesses top safety lineup.

This year saw numerous safety products put through the wringer—from survival gear to jacklines and tethers to doggie PFDs. Although safety gear lacks the pizzazz of, say, new electronics, *PS* editors consider testing it to be one of our most important tasks, and so we put substantial time, energy, and resources into making sure we back only the best products that will keep our readers and their families safe on the water. Among the most intensive tests of 2007 were the life raft and safety harness evaluations.

LIFE RAFTS

For our life raft test, we asked manufacturers to send six-man, SOLAS-grade life rafts they thought best suited a serious offshore sailor. After some tough deliberations, we gave the nod to the Elliot SOLAS-6 (pictured above). It cannot be over-emphasized that we found all of the test rafts to be very good. Each one would serve well on a cruising boat and deserves a buyer's consideration.

Elliot's rugged construction, superior inflation, and key details make it our Best Choice and Gear of the Year pick. When the painter was pulled during testing, the large gas cylinder caused



GEAR OF THE YEAR

the Elliot to spring to life with the tubes and canopy fully inflated in 6 seconds. In the raft was a full SOLAS-A survival kit with water, flares, and food. Its downside is that at 167 pounds, it was the only raft we couldn't simply pick up and toss in the water. The heavy-duty nature of SOLAS rafts became clear as we measured tube-skin thickness, checked stitching and seams, and noted little extras like a mechanical joint on the arch tube to help it endure physical punishment and better isolate it from the main buoyancy tube's air supply. At \$3,650, the price is competitive: The most expensive raft tested was \$8,200, and two others were priced over \$6,000.



Mustang MD 3184

SAFETY HARNESSES

Sailors have drowned while tethered to their boats, so an inflatable PFD with an integrated harness is preferable to a basic harness. *PS* performed a rigorous series of tests on both types, including man-overboard drills and load tests (up to 900 pounds). *PS* also conducted interviews with professional crew from the grueling 2006 Volvo Ocean Race.

The automatically inflatable Mustang MD 3184 PFD, a state-of-the-art inflatable PFD with integrated harness, was tapped as Best Choice in its category. At \$230, it's expensive, but its thoughtful design makes it worth the money. Constructed of coated nylon, with a single back strap, a neoprene collar, a low-mounted front buckle, and two quarter-inch stainless D-rings (breaking strength 4,000 pounds), the MD 3184 was the most comfortable and the easiest to adjust of those tested. With the MD 3184 hydrostatic inflator, no premature or accidental inflation occurred during testing.

Testers found the West Marine basic harness to be simple, functional, and ultra-lightweight. The no-frills harness, priced at \$50, is easy to don and comfortable. The



West Marine Basic