

BOAT

Pennsylvania

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INFLATABLE PFDs



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One of the most popular exercise devices in home gyms these days is the rowing machine. It's all part of the "Keep Fit America" craze.

But the stationary rowing machines are doing something else. They're kindling an interest in the real thing — the rowing shell.

The sport has been around a long time and is steeped in tradition. Conjure in your mind a scene of a turn-of-the-century Ivy League college and you'll see a picture of the rowing team with beanies, turtleneck sweaters, and their oars raised high. The Schuylkill Navy of Philadelphia is typical. The navy is an association of rowing clubs that was founded in 1858. Its most famous commodore was John B. Kelly, 1920 Olympic single scull gold medalist and the father of Grace Kelly.

The Federal Boat Safety Act of 1971 for the first time made it a requirement that unpowered boats carry personal flotation devices. Because the federal law requires that equipment regulations be uniform nationally, states had no choice but to adopt the same regulation.

This regulation presented a problem to the sport of rowing. There was simply no place to stow a PFD, and to wear a life jacket and remain competitive was impossible. Recognizing this difficulty, the Coast Guard very quickly excepted "racing shells, rowing sculls, and racing kayaks" from the equipment requirements, and that exception remains today.

In 1972, and until recently, the sport of rowing was almost exclusively an organized team sport. Practices are formal, discipline and conditioning are paramount, and rarely is a boat on the water without a coach boat nearby.

Even so, the sport has had its share of boating accidents resulting in fatalities. The Fairmount Dam in Philadelphia has claimed victims, as has the Charles River in Massachusetts.

If this were still almost exclusively a team sport, the solution would be relatively simple — require the coach boats to carry enough PFDs for the shell crews.

But that's no longer the case. Recreational shells are proliferating. It's a great form of exercise that has finally been recognized. These boats will soon be commonplace on our waters, particularly in early morning and evening when the water is calm and the presence of other boats is minimal.

The reasons for excepting the boats from the PFD regulations are that stowage is unhandy and wearing them is cumbersome.

There is a solution, however. Urge that the Coast Guard expedite the approval of inflatable personal flotation devices. Not only would the problem of shells be solved, but so also that of the many other PFD situations in which the currently approved devices are cumbersome.

There are some nice inflatable devices on the market now. They come in pouches that can be worn on a belt, and the modern synthetic materials require little maintenance.

If you find yourself in the water, the device will inflate automatically if you wish, or it may be inflated manually. These devices are easy to put on in the water, they fit better, and afford more freedom of movement.

Inflatable PFDs — Their time has come!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene Spori". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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The covers

This issue's front cover, photographed by Don Carey, shows *Boat Pennsylvania* subscriber Dr. John J. Trosko, of Plains, PA, demonstrating the use of a rescue bag. This safety device is used to throw a line to a victim in the water, and it serves as efficient storage for the line. Rescue bags are practical to have aboard small boats. The devices aren't new, but the information on PFDs for water skiers in the article that begins on page 14 is new. In fact, the Commission is changing its regulations concerning the use of water ski wetsuits, and this article is a complete update.

This issue's back cover, photographed by Art Michaels, shows a grandfather giving his grandson a lesson in boat handling — a lesson that teaches children to think *safety* right from the beginning of their boating experiences.

Under Way at Night by Joe Greene

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