

Gambling with a Casino Ship

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After Jay (Lagemann) and Dave (Lee)'s recounting of their harrowing nautical experiences my story is tame, but I'll tell it to keep the thread going.

In 2001 during the time I was working at MA Auto Dealers Association one of our members invited me to help him move his newly purchased used Swan 48 (I know it was a Swan and I'm pretty sure it was 48'). It was in Newport and he wanted to get it to Annapolis for a major refit. The boat had been out of service for a while and was a bit rough, but it was able to be sailed. The crew was the owner, Jack, several experienced sailors including me, a friend who was not a sailor but who was along because he is handy with mechanical things and a professional CG licensed delivery skipper. Jack is very experienced and did not need the delivery skipper, but since Jack is a wealthy car dealer, he hired the guy as a hedge against any liability issues.

Jack decided to go "outside" on a lay line from Newport to Cape May, the entrance to Delaware Bay, instead of going "inside." I was in favor of that as I was a Great Lakes sailor and had never been in open water. When we were about half way to Cape May, at a point the farthest from land, we got into one heck of a storm. I don't remember the wind speed and wave height, but it was impressive. We went to bare poles and were quartering the swells under diesel power. Then we lost power, so we were in a broach position as Dave Lee described. The delivery skipper was useless to help fix the problem as he was ghastly seasick, lying in his bunk. Jack's mechanic friend figured that the fuel line was blocked. With the boat rolling about like crazy he was upside down with his head down in the area below the cabin sole where the fuel lines ran. Somehow, he was able to clear the line, perhaps by sucking as when he came up he had diesel fuel all over his face. How he avoided being sick from the rolling and the diesel I don't know.

Rather than carry on to Cape May Jack decided to put into Atlantic City to wait out the storm. Once safely docked he dismissed the useless delivery skipper and gave him bus fare to get back to Newport.

The next day we continued. By the time we were in Delaware Bay where it narrows it was night and very dark with no moon. We were heading for the [\(Chesapeake and Delaware\) canal](#) that goes from the Delaware to Chesapeake Bay. There is a fairly narrow shipping channel with a lot of traffic from Wilmington and Philadelphia. The channel is well marked with lights on most of the navigational aids. The problem is that the shore is close enough that car headlights and lights ashore make it hard to see the nav aids. When I took the helm at the start of my watch I asked for guidance. Jack said just aim at those very bright lights you see well ahead. That was the Hope Creek Generating Station, lit up like a Christmas tree, which is on a peninsula at a large bend in the river.

No problem.....until I saw a casino ship immediately ahead of me. It was well lit, but it was exactly superimposed on the lights of the generating station so was not visible until we were uncomfortably close. I made a hard turn 90 degrees to port. Jack, in his underwear, came flying up out of the companionway asking what the "f" I was doing. Then he saw the casino ship go by behind us.

The rest of the trip was uneventful. A bonus was that when we got to Annapolis there as in-water boat show in progress.