

**By Wilbur B. Scott**

## **YOUR FIRST BOAT?**

You may be a first time boat owner or maybe you have just recently relocated to this area and are not familiar with our area waters. Perhaps too your boating experience has been confined to rivers and small lakes in other parts of this wonderful country of ours and not on large bodies of waters such as the Gulf of Mexico.

It is a very wise novice “skipper” who taking to the water for the first time is aware of and prepared for the responsibility that goes with operating a boat safely. You not only owe it to yourself, family and other passengers, but to the rest of us boating enthusiasts who share the waters with you as well.

Prudent skippers first equip themselves with boat handling skills and knowledge by enrolling in a public boating course offered by the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary. Actual experience is a good teacher, but a course in “Boating Skills and Seamanship” is invaluable to acquiring familiarity with boats, what problems to expect on the water, and how to deal with them. Too many of today’s boating mishaps can be traced to faulty boat handling by the inexperienced, untrained skipper. Without proper training a thoughtless skipper not only endangers the lives of those on board his/her vessel but also endangers other boaters as well!

I encourage not only first time boaters to attend one of the USCG Auxiliary boating courses, but experienced boaters as well. We all need to keep abreast of new techniques and changes in boating laws and regulations. These courses provide basic boating know-how such as rules of the road, navigational aids, government regulations, boat handling and the fundamentals of good seamanship. If you as a new boat owner would take advantage of this basic training and diligently try to fill the role of a responsible skipper, your dreams of enjoying recreational boating will most likely to be filled. I might offer this observation as well: Skippers who have learned to operate their vessels only through the “trial-and-error method”, without any boat handling instruction, would gain more pleasure and peace of mind by enrolling in a Coast Guard Auxiliary course. By the way, boating is a family affair so why not enroll the whole family? You never know when you might become incapacitated out on the water and it would certainly be to your advantage if others on your boat knew how to operate it as well. Accidents on the water can indeed be minimized through education.

Classes are scheduled regularly by your area Coast Guard Auxiliary flotilla and are conducted by experienced Auxiliarists. Some insurance companies offer a discount on premiums for boat insurance coverage for those owners who have successfully completed this course. It is not a

difficult course to take and pass and other than the minimal charge for materials, the course is free. Just one other thing though before I head out to go fishing, if I were a new skipper and/or a new boat owner, besides enrolling in a USCG Auxiliary safe boating course, I would ask the Coast Guard Auxiliary to conduct a free “Vessel Safety Check” (VSC) on my new boat! In fact I believe this is so important that I will personally travel anywhere within Citrus County to conduct a totally free vessel safety check of your vessel and award you with the prestigious safety decal for your boat if it passes. What if the vessel fails to meet the minimum safety requirements you ask? No problem, once the correction(s) have been made I will return and issue the decal. If you are interested in a free vessel safety check or wish more information about Flotilla 15-4 and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, (including membership), please feel free to send me an email at, [seacapt34447@yahoo.com](mailto:seacapt34447@yahoo.com) and I will be sure that you receive the information that you have requested!