

Salty Sea Dog

Red Light Warning

Salty Sea Dog asks, “Does it matter if no one obeys the rules of the road?”

I confess to being puzzled by the habit increasingly practised by the Captains of some large tall-masted sailing craft, who, during the hours of darkness, exhibit from their masthead, an all round red light. They do so when at anchor and also when alongside a berth inside a marina.

When at anchor, many of them fail to show the prescribed white anchor lights fore and aft as laid out in rule 30 of the international regulations for the prevention of collision at sea. This means that, when seen from right astern or right ahead, the red lights on the main and mizzen appear to suggest the yacht is *Not Under Command* a technical term meaning a vessel, which is unable to keep out of the way of another vessel.

I have searched the International Rules and Regulations for the Prevention of Collision at Sea (Col Regs) and can see no provision for the need to exhibit red lights at the masthead. Yet when I mentioned my query to one young yacht master he puffed his chest out with pride and said he exhibited the lights to warn low flying aircraft of the height of his mast.

Incredulously, I then asked him if, as a professionally qualified master, he was in a habit of anchoring or mooring his super yacht in such a position as to endanger the safety of low flying aircraft? He turned the same colour as his all round light and decided he had to do something else, somewhere else and shambled off before I asked him anything else.

Snobbery or One Up-Man-Ship

Dare I suggest, that the exhibiting of this light has more to do with snobbery and one up-man-ship rather than seamanship! Or, could it be that it means an unprofessional and less than knowledgeable skipper is in command? After all, if two all round red lights means a vessel is not under command then perhaps those displaying a single red light simply means the yacht is not under the command of a professional?

I have even seen ketches with lights on both their main and mizzenmasts. Presumably this is to warn any unfortunate aircraft pilot, who has flown low into airspace over a marina, that having missed the mizzen mast he now has to gain height very quickly in order to miss the mainmast.



And yes before you remind me that helicopter use is increasing in the world of super yachts, I do realise that there are many yachts with helipads on their stern decks but surely very few sensible pilots would land on the small flight deck on a super yacht during the hours of darkness.

Consider what impression a ketch displaying these misleading signals together with her anchor lights gives when seen end on or nearly end on in an anchorage. For those of you who do not need to know to do their job: two red lights in a vertical line one above the other plus all round white lights at the bow and stern, is the signal displayed by a vessel that is aground!

A Lot of Balls

It is not just lights that get abused either! How many times have you seen yachts in harbour with their anchors down and the anchor ball is still hoisted?

Yes the anchor is down but that is not what the anchor ball signifies is it? According to the rules the anchor ball is used when a vessel is at anchor and being at anchor means the vessel is not under way, aground or tied to the shore. So, if you are tied up to the dock how can you be at anchor?

You can, I suppose argue with me that it does not matter if these signals are displayed correctly or not and I may seem by many to be old fashioned but I cannot help but wonder if such haphazard attention is paid to the Col Regs, where does the slide to complete unprofessionalism stop and start?

If you have a view that either supports or disputes my own then do please feel free to bring them forward. The editors here would love to see a dialogue begin!