

## **My Offshore Yachtmaster Week by Harry Lawson - Noel Marshall Award 2024**

The Hamble School of Yachting offers a weeks theory course and a weeks practice course for the Yachtmaster Offshore qualification. Having wanted to get this qualification for a while now, for personal use and for my job in the yachting industry, I chose this particular school as I had completed my day skipper there with my brother roughly 3 years prior.

It wasn't until the end of the theory week, a couple of days before I was to start the practical week, that I realised the wide gulf in experience and qualifications needed between Day Skipper and Yachtmaster Offshore, so it's safe to say I wasn't feeling the most confident at that moment for the exam. Having only just passed the required amount of miles and passages as skipper to become and Yachtmaster, myself and my two other classmates (both of whom had completed the full Clipper round the world yacht race) boarded our Sun Odyssey 37 along with enough food to feed the Titanic for a week, they don't call it the Hamble School of eating for nothing!

After finding our cabins, the saloon in my case, and a quick introduction from my crewmates and instructor, we did a quick full boat walkthrough and safety briefing and slipped the lines to practice some boat manoeuvres. At the level of yachtmaster Offshore this practice week is supposed to be just recapping everything before the exam and you are expected to have learnt and practiced all the manoeuvres before, which I wasn't too confident I had. However after the first day of brushing the cobwebs away I was much more positive and realized it was only a couple of manoeuvres that needed brushing up on before the end of the week.



So with a couple of nasty looking low pressure fronts on their way we set off down the Hamble. The weather actually turned out to be favourable sailing conditions and we cruised around the Bramble Bank towards Cowes with a couple of reefs in the main for the first evening. It being an Offshore Yachtmaster I was expecting a channel crossing or at least to leave the Solent, however we only visited and practiced our skills between Hamble, Cowes, Southampton, Portsmouth and the Beaulieu River. This was certainly enough to cover all of the required manoeuvres but I was expecting to at least leave the Solent.



By the end of the week I was feeling much more confident and ready for the exam. The exam was also much quicker than I expected it to be, for three students it only took roughly just over 24 hours from Friday afternoon to Saturday evening. The examiner asked each of us to skipper the boat between two points for a couple of hours each at a time, testing us on different theory questions and manoeuvres. Some of the subjects I was examined on were a safety briefing which was admittedly a bit too brief, a couple of man overboard drills, both under motor and under sail (every student had to do this), and sailing onto a mooring buoy in some rather tough conditions. We also each had around an hour's oral exam where we would answer theory questions and go through a passage plan we had to have prepared. Overall I think my exam went very well in certain areas and could have gone much better in others, I did manage to pass in the end and was allowed to breathe a large sigh of relief.

Our vessel for the week was certainly well used but she was safe and fully equipped, furthermore I thought both the instructor and the examiner were friendly, reassuring and fair. We certainly didn't go hungry and the premade meals HSY provides are delicious. The theory week was also extremely helpful and I would recommend it to anyone about to do their yachtmaster Offshore, even just to brush up. To anyone else doing their Yachtmaster Sail, I wish you the best of luck!!