PFDs and safety stop switches: Boat smart from the start

by Hank_Parker

An area of interest that has followed me during my career and one that I feel strongly about is boating safety. When out on the water with family or friends, safety should never be left behind on the dock. One of the simplest and smartest things that boaters can do is to wear a personal flotation device (PFD) and use a safety stop switch that is a regular feature on most outboard boats. Research continually shows that accidents are often preventable when priority is given to common sense and safety.

A two-time champion of the Bassmaster Classic, Ranger Pro Hank Parker is the host of "Hank Parker's Outdoor Magazine." I must admit that early in my career I wasn't as pro-safety as I should have been. It wasn't until after I met a former sales rep for Ranger Boats, Blake Hunnicutt, that I began to clearly see the unnecessary risks I had been taking. With a stern expression and emphasis in his voice, Blake said, "If you don't wear your life jacket and utilize your safety stop switch, there will be a time when you will wish you had."

Since that time, I've had several situations that taught me to really appreciate the value of being prepared before going on the water. Today, I make it standard practice to attach the safety stop switch and wear my life jacket when the outboard is running. The brilliance of a safety stop switch is that it is a circuit breaker that stops the motor when activated. The switch is connected from the ignition control to the driver by a clip-on lanyard.

Many competitive tournaments state in their rules; Life jackets must be worn and securely fastened with a safety stop switch attached anytime the outboard motor is running. If you unknowingly take your boat off the trailer at the start of a tournament without wearing your life jacket and someone notices, it could cost you the check you might have won. Even if you abide by the rules at every tournament, no tournament director can bend the rules if you are caught in the wrong. There are many peers who wouldn't mind seeing you get disqualified for making a simple mistake. Until you have taken part in a tournament, it's best not to underestimate the intense level of competition that takes place. Once you're on the water, friendships are put to the side but they should never be put at risk by failing to follow common sense safety precautions.

In short - although many boaters regard life jackets and safety stops switches as a nuisance, it is the right thing to do, period. No more discussion should be required. So enjoy your time on the water. Use a good dose of common sense and make boating safety a priority. For more information, you can contact the U.S. Coast Guard at 800-368-5647 or the United States Power Squadrons at 888-FOR-USPS.

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