Frequently Asked Questions: Single Side Band Radios

Q: Are Single Side Band ("SSB") radios still required for the Vic Maui Race?

A: Yes, Appendix A to the Notice of Race revises Section 3.29.1 (a) of the ISAF Offshore Special Regulations 2010-2011 to require a marine SSB Radio Transmitter/Receiver having a power output of not less than 100 watts PEP (Peak Envelope Power) and an emergency SSB radio antenna.

Q: In this day of high technology satellite communications, why do you not review whether the requirement is still necessary?

A: The continuing requirement to have an SSB is examined every race cycle, and was reviewed by the Vic Maui 2012 Technical Committee in late 2010. After significant deliberations on requirements for daily roll call and dealing with emergency situations, it was confirmed as a requirement for the 2012 race.

The convincing argument were the comments at the Skipper's Debriefing after the race, All parties, including several entries who seriously questioned the SSB, indicated that their experience in the race highlighted the value of having the SSB as the means of primary communications while offshore.

Q: What value does the SSB provide?

A: The obvious value is ongoing operating cost. While an SSB with tuning kit such as the ICOM M801E is about 2x the purchase cost of a satellite phone, there is virtually no cost to sending/receiving voice or data. Satellite phone airtime costs are about $1 per minute and up.

The more important value that race participants have noted is the ability to communicate with other vessels on an open channel, instead of single point to point conversations. It has been noted that participants feel this provides a strong measure of comfort with respect to dealing with safety or breakdown issues. It also provides an increased sense of comradeship in discussing issues and conditions with other members of the fleet.