The Coastal Maritime Operations – Coxswain Course

I've just finished a year at TAFE doing the Marine Coxswain course. Why bother...? Good question, and it certainly wasn't required for driving a game boat around in my spare time. However, for those of you with a couple of evenings free each week and an interest in picking up a lot more smarts when it comes to skippering boats in the open ocean and all the rules and regulations involved, this is a really worthwhile course, and your insurance company will be the first to applaud the new qualification.

It's been an interesting year – the class had a pretty diverse cross-section of students, including retired yachtsmen planning to do a bit of deep water round-the-world cruising, the owner of a local construction company who cruises the Pacific in his spare time, a female yachtie wishing to work as a worldwide yacht delivery skipper, commercial fishos and trawler deck crew upgrading their watch-keeping and offshore operations skills, and even a couple of us from the SIGFC.

While those of you with your own power boats all have the basic recreational boat licences needed to operate your boat, that simple licence barely scratches the surface of maritime operations knowledge, and while most of us manage to do just fine with it, the extra qualifications that come with the coxswain's ticket not only increase your maritime operations knowledge by a factor of about 10, it also provides a commercial operations qualification.

For example, the course provides a solid grounding in coastal navigation, ship handling, ship construction, marine engine operations and maintenance, maritime safety management systems, safety and emergency procedures at sea, maritime law, and much more. In addition to the certificate itself, you also gain a first aid certificate, and an unrestricted radio operators' licence.

There are a couple of field trips on the course, during which you are exposed to onboard fire fighting theory and techniques, shooting off a variety of fire extinguisher types at various different fire classes. You also have a practical water safety and emergency procedures day where you end up floundering around in the water in lifejackets, deploying and manning survival rafts, and learning ocean survival skills.

The principal lecturer on the Coffs Harbour Education Campus course is a Master 4 certificate holder with a wealth of experience doing everything from skippering prawn trawlers in the Gulf to managing and skippering marine research vessels and other commercial operations. He takes an extremely practical approach to teaching, and is particularly good at ensuring that a class with an extremely varied experience base all arrive at the various assessments with the knowledge needed to pass the many progress exams that are sprinkled through the syllabus.

If you've ever considered putting your vessel in survey, or working on a charter boat, this is a qualification you'll need. If you simply want to pick up a ticket that

provides a greater range of comprehensive operational knowledge and safety skills that will significantly enhance your boating experience while also making it a lot safer and better managed, then this is worth the time and relatively small expense that you'll have to invest in this excellent qualification.