

Lifesaving in action

In 2008, B class lifeboats launched 2,686 times and rescued 2,573 people. In total, RNLI lifeboats launched 8,293 times, rescuing 7,612 people – an average of 21 people a day.

No time to lose

With a swimmer in peril in near gale force winds, there was no time to lose. Helmsman Darren Pollard took Flamborough's Atlantic 85 out at full speed, despite being one crew member short of the usual complement.

As they advanced, the lifeboat was hit by the full force of the northerly winds and southerly 4m swell – Darren had to ease back to prevent her from taking to the air. As they rounded the headland, the three volunteers were blinded by spray. Cliff-top onlookers pointed them towards the swimmer and they spotted him being pushed rapidly towards rocks.

As Darren turned the craft to move in towards the casualty, a reflected wave knocked her hard just as a breaking 5m swell hit. The lifeboat tipped to 60° and was swamped to seat height – but no one was lost overboard



Photo: Nicolas Leach

and Darren powered them out. Keeping his head, he repositioned straightaway for another attempt and this time used the swell to their advantage.

Reversing in close, the crew knew they were in dangerously shallow water now. Snatching the casualty, Crew Members Danny Major and Alistair Docherty held him to the side of the lifeboat while Darren drove seaward again until, clear by a good 200m, they were able to haul the cold and exhausted swimmer onboard.

The whole operation took just 32 minutes, despite the terrible conditions. All three crew voiced their admiration for the new lifeboat, which had served them so well.



Photo: Sarah Sleight

The crew

The lifeboat is the key piece of equipment that the RNLI provides its volunteer crews. There are over 4,500 lifeboat crew members in the UK and RoI. It is thanks to their willingness to exchange leisure, comfort and sleep for cold, wet and fatigue, and to spend many hours of their own time training to become highly skilled and efficient, that such a high proportion of the RNLI's money can be spent on first-class lifeboats and equipment, not on salaries. Without their courage, determination and skill, lives cannot be saved.

To find out how to visit our lifeboat stations go to rnli.org.uk/rnli_near_you

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea

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Lifeboats



Photo: Nigel Millard

RNLI

B CLASS LIFEBOAT

The RNLI provides, on call, a 24-hour lifeboat search and rescue service to 100 nautical miles out from the coast of the UK and RoI.

RNLI lifeboats can be divided into two categories: all-weather and inshore. The B class is an inshore lifeboat (ILB). The RNLI has two boats in this class: the Atlantic 75 and Atlantic 85. The name Atlantic is derived from Atlantic College in Wales, where the rigid inflatable was first developed. '75' and '85' are derived from a length of nearly 7.5m and 8.5m respectively.

Fast, manoeuvrable and very reliable, the B class operates in rough weather conditions, even at night. Introduced in 1993, the Atlantic 75 carries 3 crew and has a top speed of 32 knots. Introduced in 2005, the Atlantic 85 is 13% larger than the Atlantic 75. It has a fourth crew seat with deck space for a casualty on a stretcher and a top speed of 35 knots.

The B class lifeboat is launched from a drive-on drive-off (DoDo) carriage, by shore-mounted crane

(davit) or from a floating boathouse.

The RNLI has three classes of ILB: B class, D class and E class. These craft reach casualties in places where an all-weather lifeboat would be unable to operate, for example, close to shore, close to cliffs, among rocks or even in caves.

Different classes of lifeboat are needed for various locations, primarily depending on geographical features, the kind of rescue work that the station is asked to do and the cover provided by neighbouring stations. The RNLI carries out a 5-yearly review of lifeboat stations, looking at the incidents they launch to and the changing pattern of marine activities to ensure that the existing and future lifeboat coverage are appropriate.

All RNLI inshore lifeboats are built and maintained at the Inshore Lifeboat centre (ILC) in Cowes, Isle of Wight. RNLI designers and engineers continually make improvements to existing craft to meet the changing needs of the lifeboat service and develop new classes of lifeboat as required.

'Our Atlantic 85 is a 21st century lifeboat: she has all the latest equipment, good speed and manoeuvrability and is more environmentally friendly.'

Helmsman Carwyn Williams, Aberystwyth lifeboat station



The finer details

Atlantic 75

The Atlantic 75 is operational in daylight up to force 7 and at night to force 6. In the event of a capsize, a crew member activates a gas bottle to inflate the self-righting bag and the lifeboat turns upright in a few seconds. The engines are inversion-proofed to restart from wet.

The Atlantic 75 carries communication and electronic navigation aids including VHF radio, DGPS and electronic chart, hand-held VHF, as well as a searchlight, night-vision equipment and illuminating paraflares for night-time operations.



Atlantic 85

The Atlantic 85 is operational in daylight up to force 7 and at night to force 6. Her design allows room for four crew members, more survivors and more kit than the 75.

She is powered by two 115hp engines and has a stronger hull and greater top speed. The added radar allows her crew to operate more effectively in poor visibility and to locate stricken vessels faster.

A manually operated righting system combined with two 115hp 4-stroke inversion-proofed engines keep her operational even after capsize.

The Atlantic 85 carries a full suite of communication and electronic navigation aids, including VHF radio, VHF DF, intercom, DGPS and electronic chart, radar and hand-held VHF, as well as a searchlight, night-vision equipment and illuminating paraflares for night-time operations.

In return for their dedication and commitment, the RNLI makes a pledge to its volunteer crew that the rescue equipment is maintained to the highest standards and able to respond to every emergency at sea. A B class lifeboat is generally refitted every 4 years. This rigorous process sees the entire craft stripped and rebuilt with any part found to be worn, torn or broken, being repaired or replaced.

Atlantic 75

Date introduced:	1993
Number in fleet:	97
Length:	7.38m
Beam/width:	2.65m
Draught/depth:	0.41m
Displacement/load:	1.6 tonnes
Launch type:	Carriage, davit or floating boathouse
Fuel capacity:	182 litres
Crew:	3
Maximum speed:	32 knots
Range/endurance:	2.5 hours
Construction:	Hull: polyester glass reinforced fibre, with marine plywood stiffening; Inflatable collar: hypalon-coated nylon
Engines:	2 x Yamaha at 75hp each
Survivor capacity:	20

Atlantic 85

Date introduced:	2005
Number in fleet:	28
Length:	8.44m
Beam/width:	2.85m
Draught/depth:	0.53m
Displacement/load:	1.8 tonnes
Launch type:	Carriage, davit or floating boathouse
Fuel capacity:	210 litres
Crew:	4
Maximum speed:	35 knots
Range/endurance:	2.5 hours
Construction:	Hull: carbon fibre and foam core laminate; Structure: includes epoxy glass and foam sandwich layup; Inflatable collar: hypalon-coated nylon
Engines:	2 x Yamaha 4-stroke at 115hp each
Survivor capacity:	20



Mersey class



Trent class



Tamar class



Severn class



Tyne class



B class



D class



E class



Inshore rescue hovercraft

All-weather lifeboats

Inshore rescue craft