

SYNOPSIS



On 3 April 2001, a passenger who had been on board the amphibious craft *Beatrice*, notified the MAIB that the craft had suffered a propulsion failure on 31 March, and had subsequently beached, opposite the River Thames Fire Station, Lambeth. The accident had been reported to MCA at Orpington the previous day, but details had not been forwarded to the MAIB.

Beatrice is one of several similar six-wheeled amphibious vehicles, owned and operated by the London Frog Company. The vehicles are based on World War II DUKWs, and take passengers on a circular sightseeing tour of London starting by road at County Hall, followed by a 30 minute cruise on the River Thames.

The craft has a Class V Passenger Certificate and is licensed to carry up to 30 passengers and two crew. The captain is a fully qualified Thames Waterman and holds a public service vehicle licence.

On 31 March 2001, *Beatrice* embarked 29 passengers and, with her crew of two, started out on the 1200 circular tour. At about 1300, having reached Vauxhall, the craft entered the river, disengaged the four-wheel drive, engaged the propeller drive, and started her voyage downriver. River conditions were good, with calm waters and good visibility. About 10 minutes later, while travelling downstream, the craft suddenly started to experience severe vibration, so the captain headed towards the nearest beach. This was on the north shore, almost opposite Lambeth fire station pontoon.

At 1315, the captain called Woolwich VTS on channel 14 and told them that he required assistance. This was followed shortly afterwards by a call to the owners. The craft had taken on some water, but was already approaching the shore. Although *Beatrice* was in the process of beaching, some of the passengers chose to don lifejackets. At 1325, the London fire brigade vessel *Fireflash* came alongside, embarked 29 passengers, and transferred them across the river on to Lambeth pontoon, where arrangements were made to transport them back to County Hall. By 1415 the company engineers were on scene and found that a large floating object had entered the propeller duct and been forced upwards between the propeller and the duct plating. Apart from causing distortion of the shafting, it had caused a rupture of the duct plating. After temporary repairs, at 1505, *Beatrice* was escorted back upriver to Lacks Dock and the slipway. By 1525 she was on the slipway and able to be returned to the company's workshop for repair.

Recommendations have been made on the provision of entry guards to the propeller duct and guidance about handling passengers in an emergency situation.