

## **Ten deadly weather events that shook Britain**

### **Video transcript: 1979 Fastnet race of death**

**Survivor, Matthew Sheahan's harrowing account of the 1979 Fastnet Yacht race. From the BBC Two series Wild Weather with Paul Hudson, 2002.**

**Matthew Sheahan:** It did get very uncomfortable

**Paul Hudson:** The chaotic fury of the storm caused rapid changes in the wind direction which created towering waves that battered the boats from both sides, making them almost uncontrollable. Matt and the other experienced sailors were shocked and confused.

**Matthew Sheahan:** The crests of waves were breaking way above you and in the darkness you could hear rumbling. You would be looking around and thinking where on earth was this coming from? Then every now and then, to your horror, you would see it coming down towards the boat. That was one of the most frightening things about the whole ordeal – not knowing where these breaking waves were coming from.

**Paul Hudson:** And that's because at the heart of the storm a highly unusual event was taking place. When all the weather records were analysed they revealed the presence of a unique phenomenon. A freak event where a ton of cold dry air from high in the stratosphere - called a surface jet – forced itself down into the heart of the storm. The effect was like turbo charging. It split a normal storm into several systems – each with the strength of a hurricane. By the early hours of the next morning mayday calls were jamming the emergency frequencies. Reports were coming in thick and fast of fifty foot waves, like blocks of flats, and seventy mile per hour winds.

**Matthew Sheahan:** The one that really caused the biggest problem of all came rumbling down and hit us – turning us upside down again – but this time the boat didn't come upright. This time it remained upside down. As I was held upside down in the water I just felt cross and disappointed. Disappointed because there were so many other things I wanted to do.

**Paul Hudson:** While Matt was underwater fighting for his life, his father David had also been swept overboard.

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**Matthew Sheahan:** The next thing I remember was standing up and seeing the very thing I least wanted to see. I don't know why I knew straight away that it was my father lying face down in the water, just drifting away. That was the last I ever saw of him.

As we flew back I was looking out of the window and some people were firing off distress flares desperate to be seen and picked up. I think that was the first time that it really struck me how serious the whole scene had been.