



The following is offered as guidance on some of the rules pertaining to the current firearms regulations, and relates primarily to the carriage of firearms on-board a recreational boat, and to the use of starting cannons.

In the UK it is very unusual for recreational boaters to carry firearms. However some people do still carry Very pistols, and it is important for such people to understand the legal requirements.

The RYA advise that it is best to apply for a UK firearms license when carrying a Very pistol on-board a recreational craft in the UK as this allows the pistol to be transported to and from the boat. The pistol can then be taken off the boat and stored when the boat is left unattended. We also recommend applying for a European Firearms Pass (EFP) if you expect to cruise outside of UK waters.

### **WHAT IS A FIREARM/SHOTGUN:**

A **firearm** is "any lethal barrelled weapon of any description from which any shot, bullet or other missile can be discharged".

A **shotgun** is "a smooth bore gun having a barrel of not less than twenty four inches in length".

A Very pistol falls within the above definition of 'firearm'. A Very pistol is a firearm designed as signalling apparatus.

There is a complete prohibition on **possessing** firearms, ammunition, air weapons, gun pellets and shotgun ammunition for anyone who has been sentenced in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

### **SUBJECT TO CERTAIN EXEMPTIONS YOU MUST HAVE A CERTIFICATE TO POSSESS A FIREARM:**

It is an offence to buy or have in one's possession a firearm (or a shotgun or ammunition for either), or to acquire or transport one without an appropriate certificate. Firearm and shotgun certificates are obtained by applying to the Chief Officer of Police in your area. Certificates are valid for five years and a fee is usually payable. However, the fee may be waived if the Chief Officer of Police is

satisfied that a firearm (shotgun or ammunition) is required as part of the equipment of a boat.

The RYA advise that it is best to apply for a UK firearms license when carrying a Very pistol on-board a recreational craft in the UK because the firearm can then be taken off the ship and stored when the ship is left unattended. If you expect to cruise outside the UK RYA advise that you should apply for an EFP.

### **EXEMPTIONS:**

For persons wishing to carry a Very pistol on board their boat, there are exemptions to the requirement for having a certificate:

- A person may have in his possession (but may NOT acquire or transport) a Very pistol on board a ship as part of the equipment of the ship.

There is no legal definition, in the Act, of what constitutes a 'ship', however the police guidance is that the boat must be 'ocean-going'. We presume therefore that it includes recreational craft capable of navigation at sea, as opposed to inland navigation.

### **SECURITY:**

There is also a requirement to:

- Keep the pistol in a secure (locked) compartment and to ensure that all reasonable precautions are taken to protect it from loss or theft and to ensure that no un-authorized person has access to it.

Even though it is a piece of safety equipment it must not be openly displayed on-board and the boat must not be left unattended with the pistol on board for any period of time. The owner is potentially liable to prosecution if the pistol is stolen when the boat is left unattended for any period of time. Clearly this represents a considerable risk when the boat is undergoing refit or repair.

### **TRANSPORTATION:**

As the above exemptions only apply to "possessing" a firearm (in this case a Very pistol) a person is breaking the law if he or she, without a firearms licence, transports a Very pistol to and from the boat or stores it ashore.

## **TRAVEL WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE EEC:**

It is possible to apply for a license that will permit transportation to and from the boat. In addition to applying for UK license the owner of the pistol can also apply for a European Firearms Permit (EFP), if they wish to take the pistol abroad within the EEC. It is necessary to specify what weapons you are taking with you. The EFP cannot have an expiry date later than that of your firearms license and all weapons must be declared to customs and to the travel company carrying you, whether by land, sea or air.

If you wish to take your Very pistol to any other country, whether in or outside the EEC, we recommend that you take advice from the embassy or consulate of that country. Even in countries within the EEC, other documents may be required as well as your EFP.

These two licenses will undoubtedly provide the owner with greater security both in the UK and within other EU States. These must be renewed every five years.

## **STARTING CANNON:**

Starting cannon used by yacht clubs are exempt from the complete prohibition on weapons contained in the 1968 Firearms Act, provided they are designed as signalling apparatus. However persons wishing to possess a starting cannon must hold a firearm certificate.

Firearms legislation and the subject of firearms generally are complex and highly specialised. This note is aimed at giving you a brief outline of the rules applicable to boats, however, should you require any further information kindly contact the legal department of the RYA and/or the firearms department at your local police force.

## **CONTACTS:**

Further guidance can be found at the following website:  
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/policeguide.pdf>

The Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform  
[www.berr.gov.uk](http://www.berr.gov.uk)

For more information kindly contact the RYA Legal Department on 0845 3450373 or [legal@rya.org.uk](mailto:legal@rya.org.uk)

**Disclaimer:**

**The RYA Legal Department provides generic legal advice for its members, affiliated clubs and RTCs. This leaflet represents the RYA's interpretation of the law. It takes all reasonable care to ensure that the information contained in this leaflet is accurate. The RYA cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions contained in this leaflet, or for any loss caused or sustained by any person relying on it. Before taking any specific action based on the advice in this leaflet, members are advised to check the up to date position and take appropriate professional advice.**

mep[Leaflets/Clubs/Red Tape/Firearms Regulations]