

**Shields Fleet 9 Safe Boat Launching Initiative**  
By [Mike Toppa](#), Fleet 9 Executive Officer (#156)

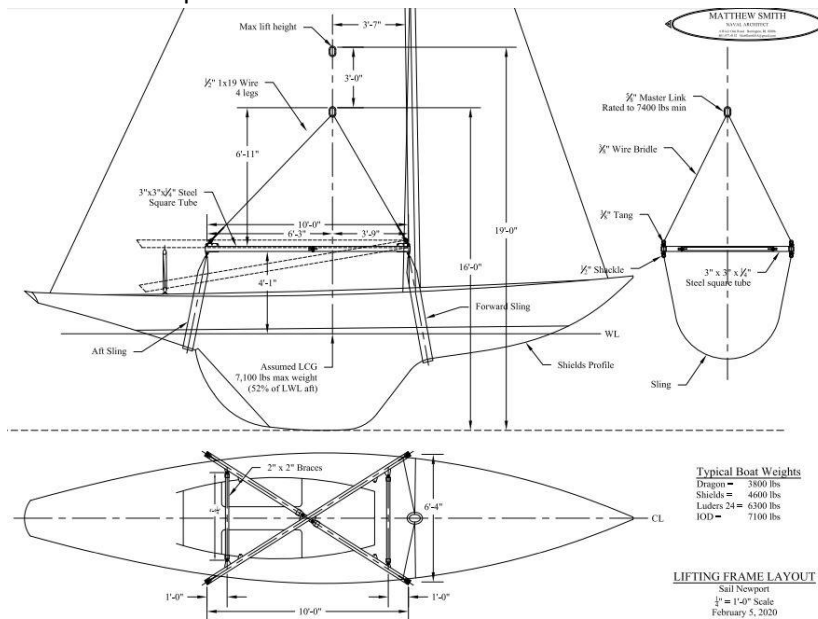
March 8, 2020

After 2 boats had keel bolts fail when launching recently, resulting in the boats dropping and being total write offs, Fleet 9 and Sail Newport met to review the launch process and find a safe, long-term solution. Besides 2 boats being total losses, luckily no one has been injured. But Sail Newport's ability to allow the hoists to be safely used by Fleet 9, within the limits of their liability insurance, has become an issue.

Some boats launch using a lifting bar connected to 2 or more keel bolts. Many launch with a Spectra bridle attached to 2 eyes on the keelbolts. Some keelbolts are bronze, some are steel. Regardless, the bridle coming off the eyebolts torques the bolts at an angle and can bend them as shown in the picture below. The 2 boats that fell launched with a bridle. After inspection, I've noticed 156's bolts are bent. Continuing to pick these 4,600-pound boats up relying on decades-old bolts is a ticking time bomb.



To bypass hoisting via keel bolts, we asked Matt Smith, NA, to design a Shields-specific frame so the boat is suspended with straps around the boat's hull instead of picking it up from the bolts on the inside. The frame is aluminum and collapsible.



The frame was designed by Matt Smith, N.A. and is under construction by Tom Rich / Safe Harbor NEB. It will be owned by Sail Newport and available for fleet use by April 20.