

“Most of the places I’ve visited on a yacht have been even better than I imagined”

The captain

# Mike Hein

Age: 48 Place of birth: Ohio, USA

Previous yachts: *America*<sup>3</sup>, *Freedom* Current yacht: *Mea Culpa* Number of crew: 6



## What was your first taste of the sea?

My first ocean passage was on the 25-metre Maxi racer *Matador* in January 1986. We sailed from New York to Florida for a yacht race with nine crew, three of us rotating a three-hour watch. We encountered seas 15 metres high and surfed down waves at 19 knots.

## Which ports do you most look forward to visiting?

I love Rangiroa in the Tuamotus in French Polynesia, or Daniel’s Bay in the Marquesas. Red Bluff in Alaska has a beautiful waterfall, where you can wet the bow of the yacht if you dare!

## What’s the one place in the world you’d like to cruise?

Most of the places I’ve visited have been even better than I imagined. My ideal trip would be to round Cape Horn on the way to Antarctica: every time I see photos or read an article it makes me want to visit.

## What do you like most about your current yacht?

*Mea Culpa* is a beautiful yacht with a great owner who built her to explore islands, bays and countries around the world. She performs well whether she’s catching salmon in Alaska or hosting diving adventures. She has completed 100,000 nautical miles and still looks the same as when she was launched in 2003.

## Which is your favourite on-board toy?

The dive and snorkel gear. It gives me the chance to teach guests how to snorkel, which is one of my favourite experiences.

## What are the biggest changes you’ve seen in the industry?

Thirty years ago, crew worked on boats because they wanted to, and they had a love and respect for the sea. They also had a love for the adventure and a willingness to learn. Today, many don’t like the ocean, couldn’t care less about seamanship and are only in it for the money.

## What advice would you give an aspiring captain?

On your way up, do every job on the boat so you have personal knowledge of how it’s done. And tell the owner the truth, always.

## What would you like to see as yachting’s next development?

Although many of my peers have made a career in the industry and have moved ashore, I would like to see all former captains pass on their wealth of experience, rather than just walking away.

## What’s the worst weather you have encountered on board?

Around midnight in total darkness, a storm came off the east coast of Australia near the Brisbane Seamount. We encountered gale-force

winds and 10-metre high seas that were constantly breaking on the pilothouse windows.

## What was your most memorable guest experience?

We organised a celebration with two tribes and their chiefs on a remote island of Vanuatu. We were escorted to the tribe’s ceremonial grounds and became honoured guests. We participated in a kava-drinking ceremony, then watched tribe members catch a pig, which they cooked in the ground. All the while, they performed traditional dances for us. It was an unforgettable time.

## What has been your most incredible experience in yachting?

I once saved someone’s life! We were diving inside the wreck of RMS *Rhone* in the BVIs when my buddy lost his regulator and ran out of air. We did buddy breathing until he got his composure back, then swam out. Later, he said if I hadn’t been there he would have tried to swim for the surface, but he would never have made it.

## Who is the most difficult crew member you’ve encountered?

One who was a know-it-all and an unsafe dive teacher! One day he blocked a toilet in the crew area and decided to ‘fix’ it with a dive tank full of compressed air. It worked, but only after the head backfired, covering him in the contents of the hose.

## What’s the biggest cock-up you’ve seen a captain make?

On a 17-day short-handed delivery from the Canary Islands to Antigua, we were sailing comfortably at 12 knots with just three crew on deck. The captain decided to put up a spinnaker and sail faster, but a 35-knot squall blew through and chaos ensued on deck. The boat broached, broke the spinnaker pole and preventer, and sheared a runner winch clean off the deck. The crew spent a day repairing it.

## And yours?

At daybreak off the Brisbane Seamount, during that storm. I needed to turn the boat round. I picked my wave and pushed her up to 95% power but I had neglected to centre the stabilisers so that when we were just at the top of the wave, making the turn, the fins stood the boat upright. We lost our footing and slid sideways down the wave into the trough. Fortunately, as soon as we entered the trough, the rudders and props grabbed, but I never did that again!

Captain Mike Hein was talking to Frances and Michael Howorth on board *Mea Culpa*. The yacht is for sale at \$18.5 million through Curtis Stokes & Associates and for charter through Camper & Nicholson’s from \$120,000pw. [www.curtisstokes.net](http://www.curtisstokes.net) [www.camperandnicholson.com](http://www.camperandnicholson.com)

