



Photography: Frances Howarth

“Your ‘company’s’ only product is the satisfaction of your owner and his guests”



Diamond A

The Captain
Owen Jones

Age: 47 Place of birth: London Previous yachts: *Little Sis, Southern Cross III, Christine, Ultima III* Current yacht: *Diamond A (ex Ultima III)* Number of crew: 15

What was your first taste of the sea?

I was brought up in Qatar in the Persian Gulf, where my father was a civil engineer. My brother and I would spend hours on the beaches, swimming and sailing in the warm waters, daring one another to capsize our Kestrel dinghies and live to tell the tale!

Which ports do you most look forward to visiting?

Hong Kong and New York City. I love arriving at the bigger ports. After a long sea passage, a complex pilotage into those massive harbours really adds to the excitement. I love ports on the Italian coast, too, particularly Genoa and Portofino, but the harbour I always look forward most to is wherever I am going next.

What are your favourite onshore hangouts?

Home is where I love, although I must confess I am spoiled for choice as I have homes in Fort Lauderdale, the South of France and Edmonton, Alberta.

What's the one place in the world you'd like to cruise to that you haven't already?

I would love to cruise the waters of the South Pacific. As a diver I have always wanted to explore the underwater wrecks from World War II.

What are the biggest changes you've seen in the industry?

I have been working on large yachts for 15 years and so much has changed in that time. I moved from deckhand to captain on *Little Sis* after 13 months – there is no way you could do that now. And the increase in regulatory work means we now have little time to research new areas, so I have to rely on advice from colleagues, local agents and magazines like yours instead.

What do you like most about your current yacht?

Firstly, that she is big, strong, seaworthy and spacious, and secondly her programme: it's the perfect mix of charter and owners' use.

What would your ideal yacht be?

She would be seven metres long, have a cooler full of beer and the only crew would be my lovely wife. Crew uniform would be swimsuits and we would go spear fishing every night for supper, which we would eat on the beach.

What would you change about the motor yachting industry?

I would like to stop charter experiences becoming production holidays. So often we visit the same ports and anchorages with other white yachts: I wish yachts would stop offering package holidays!

Which is your favourite on-board toy?

The VSAT. I use the Skype video link to chat to my 19-month-old son Rhys every day.

What's the most curious request you have had from a guest?

When I captained a yacht under charter to a family from the Middle East we had to cover up the sculptures of the naked forms and remove any paintings with nudity. The curious thing was that we were cruising the coastline of the Balearic Islands, and every day the family went to beaches on which the ladies wore very little!

What's the worst weather you have encountered on board?

I was crossing the South China Sea many years ago on a voyage from Hong Kong to Vietnam, when suddenly the part we were in turned very nasty indeed. The bridge was awash with sea water, fitted furniture moved and water entered the engineroom through fresh air intakes. Those were probably the longest 12 hours of my career so far.

What's the most stressful part of your job?

Helping my crew! I am finding fatherhood a doddle compared to looking after some crew members – there are always some who see the captain as a substitute father figure!

Any advice for an aspiring captain?

Promise yourself you will be a better captain than those you have worked for. Never forget that you are the CEO of a small loss-making business and you have to answer for that loss. Your 'company's' only product is the satisfaction of your owner and his guests.

What's the biggest cock-up you've seen another captain make?

I have a fatal fascination in watching the parking mistakes of others. I feel so badly for them while it is happening because no one else can help. It's like watching reality TV.

And yours?

I once posed for a photograph while driving a dinghy. I lost my concentration for a moment and fell over the side, and as I was not wearing the kill-cord the dinghy came round in a circle and tried to run me over. I have not tried it since!

Captain Owen Jones was talking to Frances and Michael Howarth on board *Diamond A*. The yacht is available for charter through Hill Robinson for €330,000pw summer in the Mediterranean and \$420,000pw winter in the Caribbean. www.hillrobinson.com