

Salty *Sea* Dog

Mind Your Language

Captain Michael Howorth says
It's time to call a 'Spade a Spade'

In an online discussion forum I sometimes frequent, there is the occasional discussion about seafaring terms and their correct use, the latest being over the correct description of winches and the fact that some talk of captive winches. The discussion illustrates how, many specialists in many different professions, use jargon. Inside the superyacht industry we are no exception and I think that correct terminology does not need to be abandoned just because everywhere else the consumer media continues to dumb down the use of English.

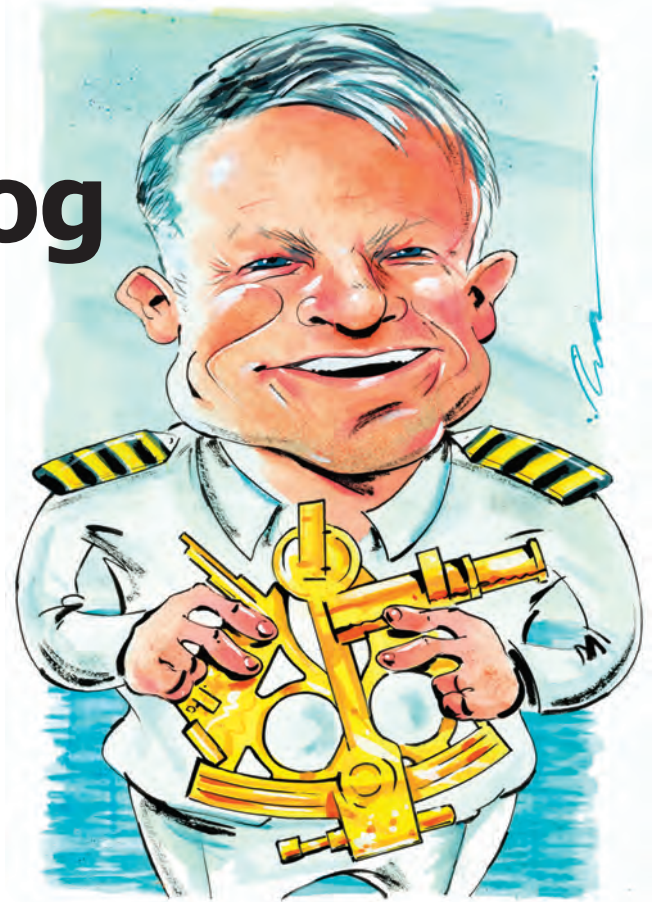
Technical terms frequently have absolute meanings which, when abandoned or substituted with more common words, often give rise to inaccurate or misleading statements and make our the English language dull and uninteresting. This particularly seems to apply to super yachts and the way they are reported outside of our own specialised sphere.

Mega or Giga?

Why, is it that in news bulletins, for example, yachts have a *top*, *front*, or a helicopter that *lands on the back*? It seems to me that every yacht reported about in the consumer press automatically becomes a *luxury superyacht* a *megayacht* or even (worse) a *gigayacht*.

What is it about the seeming pathological inability of these media mouths to mention a ships' crew without appending the word member making it crewmember? What, in any case, is wrong with the word seamen? Perhaps that has become too sexist a phrase and we cannot upset the ladies who go to sea yet should still carry a Seaman's Discharge Book. Why is it, that the trend now seems not to use the word *men* at all, to the point that Chairmen have become Chairpersons or worse Chairs and Firemen have become Firefighters? Could it be that the sound of the word seaman is a shade too close to that of a male bodily discharge and squeamish news editors, are frightened to use it lest they offend listeners' sensibilities.

Is there anything we can do to turn the tide and bring back the proper words? Firstly, I think perhaps we should watch, quite literally, our own language. We should try and use the correct terms ourselves remembering to spell the word, Draught with UGHT to refer to the depth of water rather than the word Draft which infers a chilling wind. Ropes at sea, do not, for example, break, correctly they part, yet how often do we read *the towboat's tow-rope snapped*.



Colloquial language is of course, fine and does have its place. The familiar *we're getting the boat from Dover to Calais* is completely understandable and the use of the word boat is perfectly acceptable when talking of a submarine. But perhaps, at the risk of derision, we should all gently remind friends it is a ship not a boat on which the masses go cruising and that it is a sailing boat when they are talking about a 10 metre sloop.

Colourful language

We love to tell ourselves how rich the English language is, how seafaring phrases have coloured it over the years. The nautical derivation of a brass monkey is a good example of why and how we professionals can use language appropriately and not shy from proper use of specialist terms. Used literally or metaphorically, the words add depth to our communication.

Conversely, jargon can become the language of exclusion, when used by specialists trying to set themselves apart from the layman. It is therefore not always easy to draw the fine line of where the use of the correct term becomes jargon. For example how often do we ask new comers to the industry if they have their S.T.C.W? Perhaps the safe definition is the point beyond which most literate people know, the meaning of an unfamiliar word or can understand what it means from the context in which it is being used.

I really hope that words such as superstructure, aft end, stern, seamen, and hundreds more will never cross that line, but if they do, then we should take the time to explain them, so that we may educate those who do not know in the ways of the sea. Recently a Riviera Radio reporter carefully explained the meaning of the phrase, *a financial derivative*, simply by quickly adding the words: *a contract by which risk is traded*. Surely it cannot be beyond any of the rest of us in the superyacht business to do the same on those infrequent occasions when precise but unfamiliar maritime terms are used.