



Interview & portrait photo by Frances Howorth

“It would be nice to show friends and family what we really do. My mum thinks we spend all day sunbathing!”



The Captain  
**James Campbell**

Age: 31 Place of birth: Oxford, UK Previous yachts: *Windrose, Sapphire, Ipanema/ Nephele, Indio, Romanza, Saudade* Current yacht: *Mystery* Number of crew: 4

**What was your first taste of the sea?**

My father bought an Optimist dinghy when I was five, and then I went racing in the Solent when I was older – that gave me the sailing bug. When I was 21 and working in an office I was offered a job as delivery crew on a yacht sailing from Palma to the UK. I jumped at the chance. Then I got offered a delivery to the Caribbean and I knew I'd found my career when I landed a job on *Windrose* as deck hand.

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

I love Antigua, where I started yachting professionally. I also like Mallorca – both feel familiar and I have plenty of friends there.

**What are your favourite onshore hangouts?**

It has got to be the Sandbank just off the Marina Taina in Tahiti, where you stand knee deep in water on the reef with a barbecue. It was started by locals, and it is now a popular spot for crew and locals to hang out together, eating, drinking and getting sunburnt!

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

My crew. We are a solid team and everyone chips in to help with every aspect. And there's the boat herself. *Mystery* is a great sailing yacht. We just completed a 7,000-nautical-mile voyage upwind from the South Pacific encountering big seas, but she really performed well.

**Which is your favourite on-board toy?**

It used to be the wakeboard, but now I think it is the fishing rods. This must be a sign that I am getting older.

**What would you change about the yachting industry?**

I wish people were more adventurous when they chartered and travelled further afield. There are so many undiscovered places.

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

A charter client once requested a different set of chairs at the dinner table half way through the charter. He had sat on them all week, with no complaints, but this day he freaked out for some reason. It was resolved when we just got him one from the other side of the table!

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

I was in the Bay of Biscay on board a Swan 60. We were knee deep in water in the cockpit – quite exciting for one of my first deliveries but an experience I am not keen to repeat.

**What's the most stressful part of your job?**

Accounting and dealing with boatyards – you just feel like everyone in the yard is screwing you, it is just a question of by how much!

**Who is the funniest member of your crew?**

The girls. They are blonde and come out with classics each day, like believing red cars go faster than blue. Catching them singing out loud when they think no one is about in the crew mess is entertaining, too!

**Who's the most troublesome crew member you've worked with?**

The first mate on one of my early yachts. This one never listened to the crew who'd been on board for a few months longer than he had, so we had to do it his way until he invariably found that it didn't work, and we had to go back to doing it the way we had always done it. I hate job creation!

**Any advice for an aspiring captain?**

The first job as captain is quite a big jump from being a mate so be prepared. Qualifications aren't the only factors: it takes experience, humility and being good with different types of people. Plus a sense of humour really helps!

**Who would be your top five fantasy charter guests?**

I've already had supermodels on board, so I would have to say friends and family. That sounds cheesy, I know, but it would be nice to show them what we really do. My mum thinks we spend all day sunbathing!

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

That would involve kissing and telling, and I am not sure some of my colleagues would ever forgive me!

**And yours?**

My first captain's job, when I was running a Wally 80. I had joined her in Rome and was taking her up to Genoa. However, the harbour entrance silts up over winter, and I spent several months waiting for the port authorities to dredge it, with my new owner calling me four times a day urging me to get her out. Then the port captain assured me that there was enough depth to leave. The owner was on board for the trip. As we headed out towards the entrance, we stopped. We were stuck mid channel. Quite embarrassing – first time driving the boat and I had only made about 100 yards! After applying a lot of heavy throttle we wiggled her keel out of the mud. At Genoa she had to come out of the water so that the keel could be re-faired. This meant an understandably upset owner. **SYW**

*Captain James Campbell was talking to Frances and Michael Howorth on board Mystery. The yacht is available for charter through Camper & Nicholson's International for \$60,000pw.*