

“We got a few stares as we cruised by with guests sipping cocktails underneath fully set headsails”

The Captain

# Ben Duxbury

**Age:** 48 **Place of birth:** Cornwall, UK **Previous yachts:** *Lutine, Braveheart of Sark, Marilee, Andromeda la Dea, Lady Lauren, Felicita West* **Current yacht:** *Selene* **Number of crew:** 9



## What was your first taste of the sea?

Sailing on the Helford River in Cornwall aged four. I used to go in an Eleven Plus dinghy with my father, a commander in the Royal Navy. As I got older, when he got the tides wrong my sisters and I would have to wade through river mud pushing the boat to get to open water!

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

I had always dreamed of making landfall at Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town and New York, and when I did they didn't lose any of their impact. But perhaps my all time favourites are Falmouth and Helford in Cornwall – there's no place like home.

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

I have always wanted to arrive into Sydney Harbour. Otherwise I would really like to transit the Northwest Passage once, cruise the Alaskan coasts, visit Antarctica, transit the Magellan Straits and sail the coasts of Vietnam (with a diving trip to Truk thrown in).

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

My office is pretty special. It's the entire wheelhouse and the view changes daily. *Selene* has a striking style about her: the flybridge is a delightful place for guests to relax without missing out on the excitement of big-boat sailing, and her interior is refreshingly different.

## Which is your favourite on-board toy?

Seabobs are the most fun, and they're small, easy to maintain and take up very little of our precious storage space. One of my all-time favourites is a simple rope swing – everyone loves them. My least favourite toys are jetskis, which pollute the world.

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

Believe it or not, my most frightening time was in port. I was in Cowes on the Isle of Wight when winds of over 100 miles an hour ripped through. The boat was listing so hard that I had to tie our pontoon pilings to others. That night Cherbourg marina was almost entirely destroyed, so Cowes was lucky.

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

We once carried a contestant from the TV show *Strictly Come Dancing* who needed space to practise his routines, so we relocated the furniture. He had a dance studio in the aft cockpit seating area and we had a rather cool outdoor lounge area on the foredeck. We raised a few incredulous stares as we cruised by with guests sipping cocktails on sofas underneath fully set headsails!

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

Over the years I've seen crews lose that Corinthian spirit. For the majority it seems to be almost exclusively about the money and not the adventure. That's a shame. I'm also alarmed by how quickly we're losing the skill of sailing big boats, as automation overtakes our ability to react to what we see on the water and feel on our cheeks.

## Who was the funniest crew member you've worked with?

Before our chef married our chief stew, he spent two seasons perfecting the wedding cake design. It started small and grew bigger and more elaborate each time. These became engineering projects on an epic scale, but they were delicious and each one ended up being used for some celebration or other.

## What would you change about the yachting industry?

I would encourage owners not to go bigger and instead move towards superyachts that are more stylish. Let's try and keep the special boutique feel these beautiful boats have, and avoid straying into cruise ship territory.

## Any advice for an aspiring captain?

If you want to command a Perini Navi like this one, learn how to really handle a sailboat. Start off with a small boat of your own and go cruising. Not only will it be an adventure, it will also give you a great insight into what the sea can do to a small boat and sharpen those essential skills that as a captain you will call upon in a crisis.

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

I've witnessed one captain hoist his spinnaker while his boat was in the dock. He looked puzzled when a gust of wind filled it, causing the yacht's bow to ride up onto the dock. The people sitting in the pub overlooking the harbour found it very amusing!

## And yours?

At anchor one night, a squall blew up and dragged the yacht I was on and three shackles of anchor chain half a mile. We shot right through a fish farm and although I couldn't see through the blinding rain, I ascertained my position using radar. Fortunately I kept my head and realised that engaging the propellers would make things a whole lot worse, so waited for us to clear the obstructions. We were all lucky that night.

*Captain Ben Duxbury was talking to Frances and Michael Howorth on board Selene. The yacht is available for charter through Camper & Nicholsons from \$200,000 pw. [www.camperandnicholsons.com](http://www.camperandnicholsons.com)*



Photograph by Frances Howorth