



Interview by Frances Howarth. Portrait photo Frances Howarth

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The Captain

Bill Hawes



Age: 47 **Place of birth:** Palo Alto, California **Previous yachts:** *September Morn, Mustang, Atlanta, Martha Ann, Sacajawea* **Current yacht:** *Destination Fox Harb'r Too* **Crew:** 10

What was your first taste of the sea?

I was eight. We had just moved from the desert of California to a huge home on the western shore of the Saint Mary's River in Southern Maryland with a dock and a beach – but no boat. So, like children do, we improvised. My older brother, sister and I built a very simple raft out of wood we discovered in the barn, only to find that it did not support any of us. So we put our younger brother (age 5) on it with a paddle and off he went, with his feet awash. Mom came out of the house 15 or 20 minutes later and freaked out. Her baby was out about 400 or 500 feet offshore by himself, no lifejacket, with just a paddle!

Which harbours do you most look forward to visiting?

Horta is always a favourite landfall after a long ocean leg. And I love Bonifacio in Corsica – the cliffs hide the entrance to the harbour until you are almost right on it.

What are your favourite onshore hangouts?

My beautiful garden or tinkering with my 1965 Mustang GT. In fact, any place where there are good friends for a drink and deep conversation.

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

My first would be the Canadian and US north-west coast for its rare nature, and secondly the Baltic for its history and culture.

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

Young crew getting into yachting for just the money, without any real passion or experience of boating.

What do you like most about your current yacht?

The owner is a great man to work for – as a whole crew, we agree that we don't see him enough on board. This yacht has such a welcoming atmosphere that everybody who comes aboard feels at home.

Which is your favourite on-board toy?

Being a free-diver, I would love to have a Sea-Bob underwater scooter.

What would you change about the motor yachting industry?

I would love to see more cross-training as there is on sailing yachts, where the whole crew lend more of a hand, rather than the deck hands thinking that because it is dark their day is over. And to see the stewardess getting on deck more often.

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

Once when visiting Salt Island in the BVI, a yacht from Greenpeace was anchored off, while her crew went about cleaning debris from the

island. A guest of ours wanted to visit the yacht, which I arranged. At the same time my crew made a collection intending to give cash to the crew of the Greenpeace yacht towards the cost of a beach party they were planning to hold. On the way across to the yacht we told the charter party what we were doing and they asked that their names be included as donors as well. We suggested that they might like to donate some cash as well, but they refused. Guess what sort of tip we got at the end of that charter!

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

I've been lucky but the worst in 25 years of yachting was a mistral in May 1997 – a forecasted 6 that become an 8 with seas over ten metres. We were heading to Antibes and I chose to divert through the Straits of Bonifacio. Once in the lee of Corsica the sea became a dead flat calm.

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

A power-hungry chief stewardess – go figure! There can only ever be one boss on the boat and that is the captain. When a power play begins you've got to get them off. Now she and her boyfriend run the old tub together – she runs the boat and he just says: “Yes, dear”!

Any advice for an aspiring captain?

First thought, best thought – trust your gut! Question yourself and reflect on the day's events – have briefings and debriefings with your crew, not just after hard dockings. Captains have got to inspire crew in the art of seamanship and hospitality.

Who would be your top five fantasy charter guests?

I would love to have Barack Obama and Bill Clinton on board, and maybe George Bush snr could join us. I would like to invite Sting, and Queen Nora of Jordan, or a host a mini-G8 summit on board.

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

This captain was making a very bad approach in windy conditions and bumped a few boats, then yelled: “I don't know what to do!” How could any crew ever respect him after that statement?

And yours?

Not letting troublemakers among a crew go sooner!

Captain Bill Hawes was talking to Frances & Michael Howarth on board Destination Fox Harb'r Too. The yacht is available for charter through Northrop & Johnson for \$230,000pw. www.njyachts.com