



Photograph by Frances Howarth

“The combination of a flush deck, snow and the associated seas kept us on our toes for quite a while”

The Captain

Duncan Hipkin



Age: 34 Place of birth: Durban, South Africa Previous yachts: *Mumu, Imagine, Bolero*
Current yacht: *Tenacious* Number of crew: 6

What was your first taste of the sea?

When I was 18 months old, a beach outing with family and friends. My mum turned her head for a minute and when she looked back I was floating face down in a rockpool! In a moment of panic she set a new unofficial South African 20-metre-dash-in-a-bikini record and hauled me out. Apparently, although having breathed a fair amount of salty H₂O, I was still grinning like a dolphin and headed straight back in at the first opportunity!

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

I love arriving in Antigua after an ocean crossing. There is something about coming through that gap in Falmouth that evokes a magical sense of timelessness, a similar feeling that Nelson must have felt on his own arrival after so many months at sea. Of course, he never had the heightened anticipation that Dougie's famous espresso martinis bring in on the breeze!

What are your favourite onshore hangouts?

Our family beach-house on the Natal south coast, sharing seafood caught barely 50 yards from our doorstep, with family and friends; reading a book in a sunlight-dappled room with a view of the mountains of Franshoek through the window.

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

The idea that being a captain is a profession that can be learned on paper. Until fairly recently, time on the water was paramount and I think this is still the true mark of experience. Although I support the new curriculum, and recognise the importance of specialised skills, I believe the current trend towards enormous boats and schoolrooms has narrowed the jack-of-all-trades skills that so many of the industry old salts carry with them.

What do you like most about your current yacht?

I love the way she closes up – I can be in the Gulf Stream heading south on one of those November nights that no one likes, wearing a pair of slippers and a smoking jacket! It is an incredibly comfortable boat. It gives me such a kick to see how guests come on board and instantly fall in love with her.

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

We had a trip down to the Caribbean from Maine through the Gulf Stream late one November. The systems moving off the Great Lakes were packed in like sardines, with six-hour windows between them, and we were in a rush to get going. We picked the best window we saw but still had sustained winds above 50 knots for over 18 hours.

The combination of a flush deck, snow and the associated seas kept us on our toes for quite a while.

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

Believe or not, one old gentleman looked at our mast and asked me what the big antenna in the middle of the boat was for. Some sort of lightning conductor, he imagined.

Who is the most eccentric/strangest/funniest member of your crew?

I'd like to answer that, but I might get a beating with a handbag!

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

Honestly, I have always worked with and for great people. Except for a stewardess I once took on... She suffered from an aversion to uniform requirements and to stipulated work hours, and she had a passion for the local mountain cabbage. She didn't last too long, strangely enough.

What's the most stressful part of your job?

Being in a shipyard. Getting out of there on time is always touch and go.

Any advice for an aspiring captain?

Glean everything you can from the guys above you. If you find a good captain to work under, the experience you will gain is invaluable.

Who would be your top five fantasy charter guests?

Bono, W. B. Yeats, Will Ferrell, Eleanor Roosevelt and Nelson Mandela. Yeats because he had a big hand in shaping modern literature. Eleanor Roosevelt for her uncompromising wit and deep train of thought. Will Ferrell for his nonsensical statements that somehow make sense. Bono, I believe, would be able to add to what others say, while strumming a guitar and howling at the moon. And which fantasy charter would be incomplete without some Mandela magic?

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

Leaving too much sail up in building weather then passing the buck when it all went to where it does when that happens!

And yours?

Still waiting...

Captain Duncan was talking to Frances and Michael Howorth on board *Tenacious*. The yacht is available for charter through *Fraser Yachts* for \$60,000pw. www.fraseryachts.com