

LEARNING NEW TRICKS

WORDS Esther Barney

Returning to the classroom to take on the Master Unlimited certificate, Malcolm Jacotine shares his motivations and experiences of the course and shows that it is never too late to take on a new challenge in your career.

Captain Malcolm Jacotine has been working at sea in some capacity since the age of 20, when he took to the water having spent time as an engineer and in computing. On ships ranging from small product carriers to very large crude carriers (VLCCs), his work took him around the world to locations including the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Amazon.

After a very successful period ashore his first yachting role was running a 17-m sail yacht for his computing firm ex-employer as a career break that changed his whole life trajectory and springboarded him into yachting. Three years later he stepped onto motoryachts as second officer on the renowned Martin Francis-designed, 75-m *ECO* (now *Enigma*).

Spanning 25 years, the marine career of the English-born 52-year-old has taken him to many of the usual superyacht cruising grounds of the Caribbean, US East Coast and the Mediterranean, as well as some unusual ones in the Pacific and Chile.

To many, this comfortable position in yachting would be enough to remain satisfied; with the ability to

command vessels up to 3,000gt there are plenty of career opportunities for a well-respected captain. However, Jacotine was looking for a further challenge and felt the need to return to school and tackle the “unfinished business” of his Master Unlimited ticket.

TCR spoke to Jacotine about what motivated him to return to the classroom for nearly a year – foregoing a captain’s position and salary – to take on the challenge of the Master Unlimited course, and how he has found the return to education at this stage in his career.

SO MALCOLM, WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL FOR YOUR MASTER UNLIMITED TICKET AT THIS STAGE IN YOUR CAREER?

I suppose it was a combination of three factors. Firstly, I felt that the Master Unlimited qualification, although not necessary on yachts under 3,000GT, was, from my point of view of training, unfinished business that needed to be concluded. Secondly, I had been captain on the sixty-five-metre Feadship *Lady Marina* for the last ten years and although I thoroughly enjoyed the job – the yacht was of the very highest quality

and I had a great rapport with the owner and his family – I felt I needed to stretch myself with a new challenge. Thirdly, I could also see that as yachts increased above the 3,000gt threshold there would be a need for captains with a combination of a strong yachting background and a Master Unlimited certificate of competence.

Although I am British, I chose Challenger Fremantle in Perth as [my friend and ex-crewmember] Brendan [O’Shannassy] had done his master’s certificate there. It offered an internationally recognised course and qualification, and of course the location and weather were big deciders!

WERE YOUR PEERS SURPRISED THAT YOU MADE THE DECISION NOW?

I think most of my peers were quite shocked when I told them but after I explained my rationale they were all very supportive and some of them, I think, a little jealous!

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND RETURNING TO LEARNING AFTER MANY YEARS AT SEA?

I knew, despite my experience, that there was a lot to learn. On the first

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There are more subjects and they are taught so as to give you a much deeper and broader understanding of the various subject matter. The other thing to remember is that this is the second part of the educational requirement for a Master Unlimited certificate of competence. I would have already spent nine months at college for my Second Mate/Officer of the Watch (OOW) Unlimited certificate of competence under a merchant navy apprenticeship. So it takes a total of around eighteen months of full-time [commitment] to achieve the education required for a Master Unlimited certificate.

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND OTHER YACHTING CAPTAINS WITH A SUITABLE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND TAKE THE COURSE?

I think it depends on their goal. If they are happy to stay within the limitations of the current certification – after all, 3,000gt is still a big yacht – then probably not as it is a major investment in time and money. If they wanted to move up to the larger yachts or are interested in developing their skills further as a ship's captain, then yes, I would highly recommend it.

Another point, not to be discounted, is that a Master Unlimited certificate is an internationally recognised qualification that can lead to other types of employment related to the maritime industry, including pilotage, ship operations and management, marine surveyor, and the International Maritime Organization to mention a few, so there is additional value to this qualification.

With current regulations, only those with an STCW 95 OOW certificate

of competence and the prescribed amount of seetime qualify for entry to onto this course and qualification. Who knows if there will be changes to STCW regulations, or whether the MCA will take some sort of unilateral action in the future to allow for a transition from yachting qualifications to a full commercial CoC, though with the number of yachts over 3,000gt being quite small, I can't see this being a high priority for any Flag State.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR AFTER THE COURSE FINISHES?

I want to continue my career in yachting and I hope to find a challenging position where my training and experience can make a significant contribution to the management, smooth running and safe operation of a superyacht in excess of eighty metres. ■

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day at college, when I got a true appreciation of what was to come, it all felt pretty daunting. Now I am halfway through the course I feel a lot more relaxed about the process. The course is nevertheless quite intense and it does require self-discipline and focus as there is quite a bit of self-study required. It helps that the course is well taught by experienced seafarers and that it is modular in approach.

HOW DID YOU FEEL GOING TO THE FIRST CLASS OF THE COURSE?

I was pretty nervous on the first day, a combination of being outside my comfort zone, trepidation about the depth and number of subjects I had to learn, and whether I would take to full time education.

WHAT IS THE MIXTURE OF MARINE SECTORS THAT YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS COME FROM?

In a class of eleven I am the only one from yachting or "white boats" as they like to call them here. There are a couple from large commercial ships like bulk carriers and container ships but by far the biggest majority is from oil and gas offshore support vessels. None of my classmates has had the

same level of command experience. There is also a broad cross section of ages – although, I am unfortunately the oldest!

HOW DO YOU FIND YACHTING COMPARES TO THESE IN TERMS OF THE TYPE OF EXPERIENCE YOU HAVE HAD AT SEA?

Aside from the very personal nature of the job we do – the relationship with owners and guests and the importance of the hotel side of the job, which is a major part – there are many similarities. However, I think we get more experience in navigating in congested/coastal waters and probably develop better seamanship skills. We definitely get much more experience in ship handling and manoeuvring as we anchor and go in and out of port more frequently, and we very rarely require a pilot, which, in general, is the opposite to the commercial world.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF YOUR MASTER UNLIMITED COURSE SO FAR?

I think just getting into the routine of full-time studying has been the biggest challenge.

HOW DO YOU FIND IT WORKING ALONGSIDE YOUNGER AND LESS EXPERIENCED MARINERS?

It is not really an issue. Everyone is on the course with an objective of becoming a ship's master, so naturally that brings maturity to the class, irrespective of age or experience.

HAVE THERE BEEN ANY CHANGES TO THE SEAFARING THEORY SINCE YOU WERE LAST STUDYING?

Apart from the use of a calculator instead of an abacus, it is all pretty much the same! Most of the theory side is much the same as when I did my second mate's ticket; the main difference is really in the depth you go to in any given subject. Also, today there is a need to be much more aware of legislation and regulations that apply to the maritime industry and yachting than when I first went to sea. This is becoming a much bigger issue in relation to command.

HOW MUCH OF THE COURSE DO YOU THINK IS RELEVANT TO YACHTING COMPARED TO STANDARD SEAFARING THEORY THAT APPLIES TO ALL MARITIME SECTORS?

I think all the course content has some relevance to yachting in one way or another. All of the subjects like weather, compass work, navigation, stability, construction, law, administration, bridge resource management, are entirely relevant to both types of vessels. Even subjects like cargo work have some application in yacht operations as well.

ARE THERE ANY AREAS THAT YOU FEEL ARE LACKING OR THAT IT DOES NOT COVER THAT WOULD BE IN THE MCA (YACHT) COURSES?

No, the course goes way beyond what the MCA (Yacht) courses offer.