



THE GOLDEN TICKET

After 25 years at sea and holding a Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) Master of Yachts less than 3,000gt and Officer of the Watch (OOW) Unlimited from his time in the merchant navy, Captain Malcolm Jacotine gave up his nine-year job as captain of 64m *Lady Marina* and moved to Australia to complete an Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) Chief Mate Unlimited. Following which, he went back to work on yachts including the 162.5m *Eclipse* and 124m *Katara* to earn the sea time required for the Master Unlimited oral exams. Now, two and a half years after obtaining his Chief Mate Unlimited, he holds AMSA's Master Unlimited Certificate of Competency. Over an informal lunch in Monaco, Captain Jacotine tells Lulu Trask about the lengthy qualification process, why he chose to obtain his ticket in Australia and how he sees his new qualification benefiting him in the industry.

THE CREW REPORT: WHY UNLIMITED?
THERE ARE 34 YACHTS ON THE WATER WITH A GROSS TONNAGE LARGER THAN 3,000GT, AND JUST FOUR IN BUILD – THAT'S A MERE ONE PER CENT OF THE FLEET.*

CAPTAIN MALCOLM JACOTINE: It's true. It is a rarefied market and the cost of doing the Unlimited ticket is high. There are a couple of fortunate captains in the industry who are being sponsored by their owners to do this qualification, but if you do it on your own you have to take into account the loss of earnings for a year and how quickly you can find a new position after completion of your Chief Mate. Plus there are all the associated costs of actually going to do the course – the course fees, the books, the accommodation, the travel. It all adds up. However, my belief was that there are yachts that, due to their size, would benefit from having a captain with a combination of years of yachting experience and a commercial Unlimited ticket.

In the past they had to get captains from the commercial fleet because, of course, the yachting qualifications are limited to a maximum tonnage of 3,000gt. Unfortunately, and allowing for a few exceptions, very few of those captains with commercial tickets actually have yachting experience. And it does take a shift in mindset, even from a cruise ship to a yacht, as operationally they are very different. Cruise ships work to fixed schedules and plans, sometimes worked out years in advance, whereas one of the joys of yachting is its spontaneity; you could be heading to Sardinia and halfway there the owner decides to go to Corfu instead. So you have to be flexible, not phased by demands or requests and calmly arrange changes in a seemingly seamless and effortless manner, remembering at times you also have to be a supreme diplomat, dealing face to face with owners, high-net-worth individuals, royalty and politicians.

All of these differences sometimes make it difficult for commercial officers to adapt to

yachting, plus there is also the issue of rotation, which is the norm for them, but not always offered on yachts. Some never 'get' yachting and do not adapt, whether it be due to the work or conditions, and leave the industry. Fortunately, there are a number of highly respected captains who came into yachting years ago, some of them cutting their teeth on smaller vessels, who understand yachting and all its nuances and are now using their experience and commercial qualifications to command the new breed of superyachts – these are the people who inspired me to obtain my Unlimited ticket.

TCR: AND WHY AUSTRALIA? WHY NOT STAY AT HOME AND OBTAIN YOUR CERTIFICATE WITH THE MCA?

MJ: I'm a warm-bodied person and I love the sunshine. Although I'm British I haven't really spent much time at home for many years, plus my wife's Australian. A respected captain



Captain Malcolm Jacotine

and good friend of mine also did his Master Unlimited in the same college in Fremantle.

Another reason I chose not to do it in the UK is that with the MCA, after your Chief Mate Unlimited, you would have needed to get 18 months of sea time before qualifying for your Master Unlimited orals; with AMSA you only need to do 12 months. However, although AMSA requires less sea time, it does require you to do it on a vessel over 3,000gt (there is a plan to change this with a rewrite of Marine Order 3 and reduce it to 500gt in line with STCW). The MCA, on the other hand, requires the sea time to be on a commercial vessel over 24m or 80gt under MGN 92 (M). So, doing the qualification with AMSA I had to go back as a chief mate on a vessel over 3,000gt to get my qualifying sea time and that was a bit more difficult and of course the lower salary added to the overall cost, but I think the way I did it benefited me. Ultimately, my goal is to command a vessel over 3,000gt and so my experiences on *Katara* and *Eclipse* have provided me with a much better understanding of how those boats are operated and managed.

TCR: WHAT IS IT THAT APPEALS TO YOU SO MUCH ABOUT THESE BIGGER SUPERYACHTS? IS IT JUST THE BIGGER THE BETTER, OR IS IT THE CHALLENGE OF MORE CREW AND BIGGER OPERATIONS?

MJ: I am not under any illusion that bigger is better. Like any yacht, the enjoyment of your command depends on a myriad of things. However, for me it's the experience of operating and managing these yachts that appeals so much. The sheer size of the vessel, complexity, number of crew and passengers and increased regulations – Passenger Ship (SOLAS) or the Passenger Yacht Code (PYC) – to which vessels carrying over 12 passengers are subject, all bring about new challenges which I find exciting.

TCR: OTHER THAN YOUR MASTER UNLIMITED, WHAT DID YOU GAIN FROM DOING THE COURSE?

MJ: While some of the subject matter may be similar to that of the yacht courses, such as law, meteorology, stability and navigation, the depth is so much greater. Even cargo operations, although not seemingly relevant to yachting, were valuable as you are dealing with ballast, fuel and weights and this significantly improves your understanding and knowledge of stability. The total college time (OOW and Chief Mate) required for my Master Unlimited was about 18 months – substantially more than required for yachting qualifications. As part of the ship-handling module we had to do a number of pilotage runs on commercial vessels to help with our understanding of the use of tugs, and administration of the ship was a big part of the course, including international laws and conventions, chartering, insurance, salvage, manning and leadership. The course expanded and improved upon the knowledge I already had and exposed me to the more heavily regulated commercial ships, giving me the chance to compare the two sectors and the way the vessels are run and operated.

I was the only candidate from the yachting industry doing the course and I thought I'd be a fish out of water in terms of my experience, but that didn't hold out to be true. In terms of ship-handling, navigation and management experience, I was way ahead of most of the people there because their experience was that of either third or second officers. None of them had command experience. And it's quite interesting, because a lot of the commercial officers who don't know the yachting industry have a poor view of it and the quality of those employed within. And while there are some examples of yacht captains out there who are inexperienced and in command of yachts beyond their capabilities, there are many excellent captains in our industry. Typically, our ship-handling skills far surpass those of commercial captains. Commercial ships have pilots to take them into port; we do all our own manoeuvres and often into very tight spaces. We often have to operate inshore in heavily congested waters, dealing with more recreational traffic which can be challenging to say the least. Navigation can also be more demanding, because when we're operating close inshore, the quality of the charts may be poor and we have to use our local knowledge, judgment and experience, and on occasion do our own surveying to ensure a certain bay or channel is safe to use. »

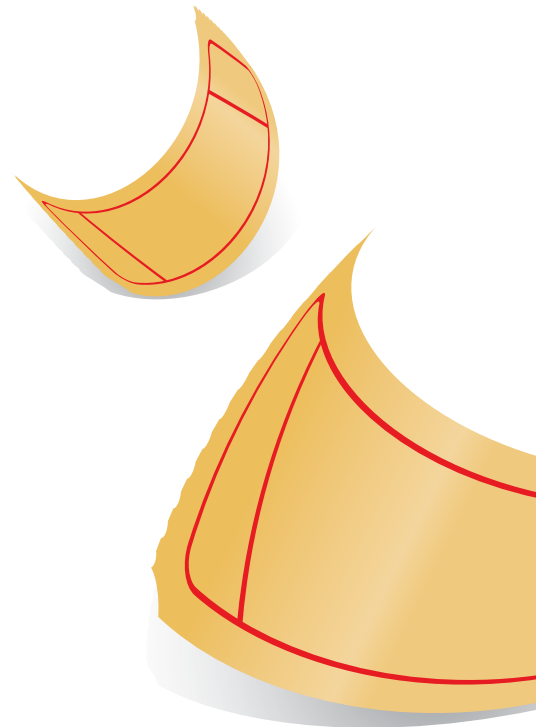


Lady Marina

TCR: YOU'VE MENTIONED THERE ARE SOME CAPTAINS WHO LACK THE EXPERIENCE TO BE OPERATING THESE SUPERYACHTS. HAVING RECENTLY UNDERTAKEN A COURSE, DO YOU FEEL THESE ARE SUFFICIENT? ARE THE COURSES OR CAPTAINS TO BLAME FOR INSUFFICIENT CREW QUALITY?

MJ: It's a difficult one. As I said, there are many excellent captains who have the right experience and aptitude and take to the responsibility of command and yachting very well. But it's true; there are also a number of inexperienced captains in charge of big yachts and you do wonder why. I guess part of the problem is that the industry is growing and with the number of new yachts being launched they will require more captains and crew, and it seems people are being promoted into positions of command before their experience has caught up with them. It happens differently in the commercial industry. In the commercial industry

you essentially sail one rank below your qualification and command normally only comes about after years of time served as a chief officer. The other difference being, commercial ships are operational 365 days a year, whereas some yachts may only be used four weeks a year, so the yacht crew cannot hope to get the same degree of operational and watchkeeping experience. In yachting you can get your Master of Yachts less than 3,000gt today and tomorrow you could be captain of a 65m yacht, never having crossed an ocean or even worked on a yacht over 20m. So I don't think it is the courses or the captains themselves; the issue lies with those who are advising owners and recommending candidates without suitable experience on vessels of similar sizes, types, operational profiles and cruising areas.



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TCR: OBVIOUSLY THE COURSE TO GET YOUR MASTER UNLIMITED IS A LONG ONE. DO YOU FEEL NOW, ALMOST THREE YEARS AFTER YOU BEGAN THE COURSE, THAT IT WAS THE RIGHT CHOICE AND THERE ARE THE SAME OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO YOU THAT YOU EXPECTED?

MJ: I did feel that there was opportunity out there for someone with lots of years of experience of yachts and a commercial ticket and I still believe that is the case. Talking to various people in the industry, my feeling is that, as well as the existing fleet of yachts over 3,000gt, there are other significant yachts in build or near to being signed, so the superyacht fleet is still expanding and will need experienced captains

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to command them. In addition, yachts carrying more than 12 passengers and being built to the PYC will require commercially qualified officers as well. My Unlimited ticket also means that, should I work on a smaller yacht for an owner who wanted to build a larger yacht, he would not have to compromise on the design or size of the vessel to keep it below 3,000gt in order to keep me as captain, which seems to have been the case on a couple of builds. But I have to say that in the period between deciding to do this and now, what I've found is those very large yachts which

have employed commercial crew – first officers, second officers and so forth – well, those officers have gained more experience of what yachting's about. So there are probably more candidates for any given vacancy, though most of them will not have had any command experience, so that could be the difference.

So to answer the question: yes, I believe it was the right choice at the time and I remain confident that there are opportunities out there for someone with my experience and qualification. However, with hindsight it is not a journey I would recommend lightly, and anyone considering following the same path and improving their knowledge, qualifications and employment prospects should really understand the costs involved and their ultimate goal; after all, you can have an amazing career in yachting without having to exceed the 3,000gt limitation.

For me, it has been a journey of personal and professional development, not without its ups and downs, but I have now achieved the first goal I set myself when I left *Lady Marina* nearly three years ago. My next goal is to use my new-found qualification to command a vessel over 3,000gt, or a vessel built to the PYC. Then I can use that combination of a commercial ticket with my 24 years of yachting experience to bring the essence of yachting to the larger yachts. ■

* Source: *SuperyachtIntelligence.com*

See issue 40 of *The Crew Report* for Malcolm Jacotine's thoughts at the very start of the Master Unlimited course.

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