



» place to co-exist, so that in itself is a good test on whether you really want to pursue a career in sailing.

Towards the end of the course the school puts a tracker on the boat and lets you out to clock up as many miles as possible with three other students. You have free run of the English Channel, which is a big bit of water. The tides are strong, the weather can be unforgiving, and there's a lot of big ships to contend with. We went into some really challenging entrances on the Brittany coast and on one occasion got a lobster pot caught in the propeller at 3am off Guernsey with the wind blowing us onto the land. It was ultimately an opportunity to prove to ourselves we could do it. I believe the course actually breeds quite cautious sailors.

Tell us about your first job after qualifying?

I set about building my miles as volunteer crew on yacht deliveries. There's no money in it, and the margins in yacht delivery are tight so the boat goes out in serious conditions, so it's a great platform to entrench what you've learned. In the long run six months of back to back delivery crewing paid off. The first trip I did was a bit of a baptism of fire. I and two other guys delivered a yacht to Sweden. We were quite literally three men in a boat. By the time we had reached Denmark there was so much ice on the deck we had to melt through it with boiling water to get to the fuel cap. We got stormbound several times, but when we eventually got there,

the Swedsh Archipelago was staggeringly beautiful. It distilled why I'd made the trip and made it all worth it.

A few weeks later I got a phone call about a last-minute delivery from Fort Lauderdale to Europe. It was a high performance yacht built by Oyster. We went through some big North Atlantic swell. She took everything in her stride and looked incredible on the quay, a real head turner. From then on I was set on skippering an Oyster.

“ IN TERMS OF MY OWN RAW SAILING AMBITION, I'M PRETTY KEEN TO SAIL TO THE HIGH LATITUDES, ANTARCTICA IN PARTICULAR, WHICH CAN BE PRETTY TREACHEROUS ”

That summer I got a job skippering yachts for a holiday company called The Yacht Week in Croatia. I learned a lot about running a yacht with paying guests as the only crew. The guests/crew were from different parts of the world. I love that international aspect of it.

You particularly like working with Oyster, why is that, and where have the yachts taken you?

Oyster is one of a handful of British boat builders to not only remain, but go from strength to strength in the UK. I've found a great niche sailing them. The owners,

even though they often have professional crew, genuinely love sailing. The client I'm working for here in the Caribbean has an Aston Martin at home, which he uses for long distance motor touring – there's certainly parallels with the two brands.

Oysters are built to go around the world with ease, so they're fundamentally strong and very well equipped. Most have satellite communications, air conditioning and some have kit to make their own fresh water. One was recently commissioned with a piano built into the owner's cabin and another with a hundred litre rum tank that can be filled from the deck and emptied from the galley.

My first full time Oyster job was running an Oyster 575 out here in the Caribbean for six months. Last summer I skippered another 575 from Galicia in Northern Spain to Turkey over a six month itinerary. I've just finished helping a regular client racing in the Oyster Regatta in the British Virgin Islands. The start line of the third race was off Richard Branson's Necker Island. As a crew, owners, guests and myself we fought tooth and nail with another yacht for several hours and beat the other 575 – just. A few hundred metres from the finish, we were 32 tonnes cutting through the water, only a few metres from one another, the media helicopter buzzing us only metres from the mast. I thought I wasn't much of a racer – it turns out I am!



Tell us about the people you work for. Are they simply wanting to charter a yacht for a holiday?

I work directly for yacht owners on a freelance basis and take on bespoke charters very occasionally through the winter. Oyster owners tend to be sailors themselves, even if they employ professional crew, so it makes for a relationship that's professional but equal and very much first name terms – which tends not to be the case in the super yacht industry. The standard of experience for guests remains very high, we just deliver it more informally.

The guests I have on board are often fascinating characters. I often eat with them, so you get to know people quite well. The industry is built on total discretion, they're assured of their privacy, so they can really relax. Last summer I had chairmen of private banks, a professional footballer turned banker, a ski instructor and a war correspondent straight off the plane from Syria. There's always good conversation. One of my clients is an entrepreneur. He ran his businesses from the boat even crossing the Atlantic, which took 22 days. Being exposed to that level of energy is exciting.

When you are skippering what is your typical day?

It a cliché but every day is different. I'm always up early, it's too hot to wash down the boat otherwise. I'll prepare the boat for sailing, download a weather forecast and have a look at the itinerary, which generally

depends on where the wind is going.

It doesn't always go to plan. Last year we ended up storm bound on a Greek island for three days. I explained to the guests they would miss their flights from Bodrum. Twenty-four hours later and the island turned out to be a pretty good place to be stranded. When we eventually left, at four am, they all got up, made some Bloody Marys, and watched the sunrise from the cockpit as we headed out. It's great when guests embrace the nature of sailing. During another trip last summer we had an engine problem three days into a charter out of Ibiza – we needed a part that wouldn't come until the end of the week. I went up on deck and announced we were going nowhere, I felt awful. The guests' first question was whether the ice maker would still work – it would. They poured me a gin and tonic and told me not to worry, it was beyond my control. They were fantastic.

You are currently in the Caribbean, where will you be over the summer?

I'm about to wrap up things here in Antigua. The boat I'm on at the moment has to be put on a stand out of water for the summer. During the hurricane season no yachts are insured to sail so everything stops abruptly for insurance reasons. This summer I'm sailing a yacht from Turkey to Palma with professional crew. Then we'll be based in Palma with trips to Sardinia and Corsica.

So what does your future hold, any ambitions to visit a particular destination?

The idea of discovering new places underpins what I do. I used to organise sponsored walks in the Ribbles Valley for charity. One route was the Tolkien Trail and Tolkien once wrote: 'Not all who wander are lost', I think there's a lot of truth in that. Running a yacht is a fantastic challenge but I intend to broaden what I do.

“ THE GUESTS FORMED A TEAM AND WE'D SAIL ALL DAY AND PARTY ALL NIGHT TOGETHER ”

In terms of my own raw sailing ambition, I'm pretty keen to sail to the high latitudes, Antarctica in particular. It's an increasingly popular sailing ground, but still potentially treacherous. I did a course over winter so I can carry and administer prescription medicine offshore and in the process met quite a few serious explorers, people setting records and discovering the undiscovered. It was a reminder that it would be easy to settle into circuits round the Med and Caribbean in rotation. That's not really me. ■