

BBC Gets it Wrong

Although clearly still very painful for the families these events are however historic. The events portrayed in the programme date back as far as 2003 and most recently 2007. It is not breaking news.

It is totally wrong to suggest that professional captains would allow themselves to be pressured into making unsafe decisions. It is an insult to their reputations. No captain will decide to leave port and knowingly sail directly into a gale and risk his own life and those of the crew. A Captain is responsible for navigation. He creates the passage plan. It is not created for him. No one other than the Captain decides when to leave port and the course to steer.

Captains are contractors and are free to accept or decline deliveries. They have no obligation whatsoever to take a yacht on a route that they feel is unsafe. There are no time constraints in their contracts. They are not penalised for taking longer than a client would expect, nor are they rewarded for making a fast passage. They are expected to make a safe passage. It should also be made perfectly clear that there is no financial benefit to the Company to complete a delivery within a specified time. The time taken to deliver a yacht makes no financial difference to the company.

The BBC was incorrect to suggest that Alastair was forced to give up his Christmas. Captains will advise us when they are available. They can work whenever, where ever and for who ever they wish. They do not have to work during the Christmas period or school holidays or any other time that they choose. They are freelance subcontractors that can pick and choose the jobs they want. It is also totally incorrect to suggest that the death of Alastair's crew Mick was in some way related to the accident. He was involved in a road traffic accident some years later. Totally unrelated.

How and where a yacht is registered is the decision of the owner. The captain and management company are not involved in that process. Irrespective of how a yacht is registered or if it is registered at all, it will still need to comply with local safety regulations. There were personal lifejackets, liferafts, flares, emergency beacons and more. The equipment on the yachts comply.

John Anstess was an extremely professional and qualified Captain and life boat coxswain. He had completed survival courses and knew more than most about the dangers of sea. It is wrong to think of him as someone that could be bullied into doing something dangerous and unnecessary. His reputation is continually slighted and he is not here to defend himself.

Dee suggests that John would have been under financial pressure to complete a delivery in an unsafe way. This shows a lack of knowledge in the way the industry works. His initial costs would have been covered by the funds paid to him before joining the yacht. It is not unusual for a delivery to take longer than originally planned and Captains can have additional expenses. On these occasions the Captain requests additional funds to enable him to continue. Lack of funds is not a reason to disregard safety. It is also not unusual for deliveries to be suspended for technical or weather issues and be completed at a later date. What is also not made clear is that John discussed all options and then advised us that he was taking a coastal route that would offer ports of refuge as required. It should also be pointed out that we did not advise anyone not to contact the Coastguard. The coast guard would respond to any distress call or if a vessel was overdue. John had only just left port and was not overdue.

The BBC were given a great deal of material by Reliance in response to their questions but yet very little of that seems to have been presented. For example it is not mentioned that all captains have access to professional weather information 24/7, they all have two way communications and can request support at any time, they all undertake risk assessments before they sail and the Company's documentation, procedures and policies are externally audited every year to attain ISO9001 accreditation. All their questions were answered in full. They were provided with pages of information, emails and statements from captains, but very little of that appeared in the programme. It is therefore assumed it did not support their victim/villain scenario that they wanted to portray. The ambush in a public car park was designed to catch me off guard and un prepared. It was heavily edited to show a lot of my back. Reality was I spent much of the time to camera answering their questions. That clearly did not fit their pre conceived format. The BBC made the conscious decision to only talk to relatives and competitors. There was only ever going to be one biased outcome. It was on that basis I did not agree to an interview. Disregarding that request they tried to impose an interview in a public car park. It is easy to criticise and make entertainment from it.

CVs have not been altered. There would have been no need. All our captains are highly experienced and qualified. Despite being asked, the programme's producers have not shown the Company any details they refer to so it is impossible to respond specifically. I would question the authenticity and origin of that claim. Ex rogue employee Mat Sandys-Winsch and now competitor confirmed under cross examination in a tribunal that whilst employed by Reliance Yacht Management he had set up multiple competing companies, stolen documents and proprietary information. He later impinged copyright and altered documents for his own benefit. His contribution to the programme is not credible. We have talked to others that have worked with him who agree. He hides behind many false emails to try and libel his competitors. He has not realised yet that emails can be traced back to an IP address and postcode. There is a growing file of evidence against him, part of which is in the possession of the BBC. Joe Cocking who is Matt's partner and co director has worked or works in the television industry and would clearly benefit financially from any programme that sets out to discredit a competitor. At no time was any conflict of interest declared.

We encourage clients to meet captains or at least talk at length over the phone about their experience. To falsify a captain's history cannot be done. Copies of certificates are kept on file and are freely available for clients and insurers to inspect.

To hear the stories from the families is heart wrenching and you cannot help feeling for them. To lose a loved one must be the hardest thing. I was invited to attend the funeral of Alastair and was pleased to meet and talk with his family during that difficult time. I do not recall receiving any message from Steve Hobley's family and would of attended his memorial had I known.

No reference was made to the fantastic captains that are presently working for Reliance and have done so for years. Reliance Yacht Management has a good reputation and a lot of credit for that must go to the Captains. If the BBC had taken the time to talk to anyone of them they would of realised that the office does not force them into making unsafe decisions. The captains decide if a yacht is fit for delivery and they take responsibility for the navigation. The office supports them. It does not intimidate, browbeat or bully them.

I have to say how touched I am at the unsolicited emails and texts from clients, captains and others within the industry with messages of support and who understand the reality and the motives behind the programme.