

BBC Insults Yacht Captains

The Programme refers to incidents that occurred over 5 years ago. Whilst it is not clear why it was decided to make it news now, it is clear that its production was motivated by those wishing to gain financially from the distress of the families.

The presentation is deeply flawed with many factual errors. It is strongly edited to create a polarised victim and villain view and does not reflect reality.

The loss of a family member is the worst that could happen to anyone. We have lost friends and colleagues but we can only imagine the pain and suffering their families have gone through. We sincerely feel for their loss.

The business has been operating for over 25 years and over that time we have moved thousands of yachts safely to all parts of the world. Nick Irving has hundreds of thousands of miles of experience sailing the same routes at the same time of year as those mentioned in the media. Reliance has used hundreds of captains to move thousands of yachts over the years and accidents are fortunately very rare. We strive to maintain high standards. Each and everyone of the captains are experienced and have professional qualifications. Before commencing any voyage they go through a thorough inspection of the yacht and carry out crew safety briefings. This will include man overboard, fire drill and use of safety equipment. They undertake weather routing and submit a passage plan. This is documented and our professional Captains take every precaution possible. If no radio receivers are installed then Captains will have their own SSB receivers for weather information. They will have EPIRBs for emergency positioning. They will have VHF radios and satellite telephones for two way communications. They have 24 hour support and will never knowingly take any risks that will unduly endanger the boat or crew.

Reliance Yacht Management provides every Captain on every delivery the means to carry out a wide ranging risk assessment before departure. Our policies and procedures are continually reviewed with the intention of reducing risks whenever and wherever possible. It is important to our captains, crews, clients and our staff that they know that everything is being done to operate in a safe way as possible. To this end, every year since 2004 our business practices have been open to inspection and scrutiny by an independent third party who have unhindered access to all areas including documentation, recruitment policies, operating procedures, record keeping, guidelines, insurance and health and safety policies. We are the only delivery company that continually reaches and exceeds the standards to be ISO9001 compliant. Others have either failed to comply or have not applied. Operating in an area with inherent risks, it is important to have the business practices independently inspected and approved.

We do not agree with the suggestion that our Captains would allow themselves to be swayed by commercial pressures, whether from an agent,

crews or yacht owners in such a way that would compromise the safety of the crew and the yacht. Any Captain and crew can choose to accept or decline any delivery offered. There are no contractual obligations to complete a delivery within a certain timeline and Captains are not penalised for taking longer than expected. Similarly they are not financially incentivised to move more quickly than is safe to do so. There are no time or routing constraints in the way Captains carry out a delivery. The final course sailed has to be the decision of the Captain based on the prevailing conditions at the time. All Captains understand that. It is simply not possible to force a Captain to adhere to any specific course.

Captain John Anstess was a close friend and colleague that the sailing fraternity sadly lost in 2006. Not only was he a highly experienced and qualified delivery captain, he was also lifeboat Coxwain. He was highly trained and knew the dangers that the sea could present. We wish to defend his reputation. He was a true professional and it would be a sleight on his character to suggest that he would allow himself to put the crew and boat in undue danger for financial reasons or was pressured to do so by management or non sailing admin staff.

We have no knowledge of documents being altered and we do not see any benefit or reason for it. All captains used by the company have suitable experience and qualifications without any need for embellishment. Copies of certificates are held on file for confirmation and made available to clients and insurers on request. We would question the source and validity of this allegation.

Throughout the industry yacht delivery companies operate in a very competitive market with small margins. They do not enjoy the high figures associated with the luxury superyachts that are often seen in the press. Claims and legal costs can be crippling and force companies to close. In small businesses the large financial reserves that people believe exist are not actually there. The company has always applied all resources available towards these matters. Legal advice was sought and followed when first incorporating and structuring the business 15 years ago and in response to any civil matter. The business has always operated legally. It has always sought and followed advice given. Our solicitors have been in contact with the relevant parties in response to their concerns and to clarify the situation.

The business has completed thousands of yacht deliveries worldwide including many over similar routes and at similar times of the year with equally experienced and qualified Captains and crew. Any incident will cause one to assess the policies and procedures and look again at its operations. To see if everything possible was done to minimise the risks. These were tragic accidents that have left families without their loved ones and our thoughts must ultimately be with them.