



Mark Binnie

'YACHT MANAGEMENT' COMES ONLY FOURTH ON A LIST OF BURGESS ACTIVITIES, SO IT MIGHT COME AS A SURPRISE TO DISCOVER A DEPARTMENT OF 25 HIGHLY QUALIFIED PEOPLE ENGAGED IN THIS AREA. TO FIND OUT WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY DO, DAVID PELLY SPOKE TO HEAD OF DEPARTMENT MARK BINNIE.

THE BUCK STOPS HERE.

Most people who flip through the pages of *Boat International* or the other glossy yachting magazines probably conclude that the main activity of Burgess is brokering the sale and purchase of large yachts. It certainly came as a great surprise to me to find such a busy and well-staffed department working behind the scenes in Yacht Management, headed by Mark Binnie, a Master Mariner who was a deck officer with Cunard before moving to Burgess 20 years ago.

Who's who in yacht management?

In reply to my first question, Mark reeled off a long list of people, nearly all of who had 'come ashore' from senior jobs afloat. Master Mariners rubbed shoulders with Chief Engineers and Marine Superintendents; staff CVs include former employers such as P&O, Shell Tankers, Cable & Wireless and The Royal Navy, plus numerous famous yachts.

"That sounds a bit like the shore management team of a major shipping company," I said.

"Yes," said Mark "and in many ways that is exactly what we are. We manage the operation of a large fleet of vessels, which are scattered all over the world. The big difference is that whereas merchant ships operate in the most economical way possible, yachts are special and delicate, because things like design, appearance and finish are more important to the owner than miles-per-gallon. They have to be kept in cotton wool."

Moving on to the big question, I asked why yachts need to be managed. Isn't that what the captain does?

"The captain does a great deal," replied Mark "and our role is to support him. When owners ask this question, I usually list all the legal obligations, the safety requirements, crewing, berthing, bunkers and stores, maintenance and repairs and so on and ask if he thinks his captain can take care of all that at the same time as running the ship. The answer, of course is 'no' so then I am generally asked about cost and like to point out that a management contract costs roughly the same as employing another mate."

Protecting the owner's interests

"A large yacht represents a very significant investment that needs to be protected by proper management. The owner can set up his own office to do this - some have - but most see the advantage of buying into many years of experience plus the economies of scale that result from our dealing with a large and diverse fleet.

"Without a management team, the captain is the sole point of contact between owner and yacht and if he should leave for any reason, there is going to be a big problem."

Knowing that finding good crew can be a real challenge because the world yacht fleet is growing so fast, I asked whether Burgess acts as a crew agency.

"We are not an employment agency" Mark replied. "Although owners often ask us to help find crew and we do maintain a huge database of captains and chief engineers. Lucy Medd runs our crew management department, which looks after all recruitment issues, including salaries, insurance, medical cover and all the other aspects of employment.

"Good captains are crucial, and we know who they are. Without this knowledge, things can go terribly wrong. We knew of an owner who ran through nine captains in a year before he signed up to let us run his yacht. Then he started to enjoy it, chartered it successfully and eventually sold it at a significant profit."

Managing safety and security

Yachts continue to get bigger and crew numbers increase to match. Burgess is currently managing the build of a yacht that will operate with a complement of 130 crew members. Being human, they are bound to suffer accidents or illness and the company will also supervise their insurance claims and treatment. "Accidents do tend to follow a pattern," says Mark "so we collate reports and circulate them round the fleet, to help with prevention."

If there are two subjects guaranteed to cause most people to glaze over they are likely to be the

regulations: International Safety Management (ISM) and International Ship & Port Security (ISPS) but Mark launches into them with his usual breezy confidence. "We love ISM!" he enthused. "People think it is a load of additional rules and regulations, but it is not: it is a management system that assists crews to do what they already know they should do. A super checklist if you like. Some crews work like clockwork but if one cog leaves, it can all fall apart unless there is a written plan in existence."

ISPS is not quite so easy to defend, as there seems to be a hint of paranoia in the rules, but we both recalled walking aboard yachts and not being challenged by anyone before reaching the crew mess and asking for a cup of tea - and even then they only wanted to know if you took sugar. Regrettably, security has to be taken a bit more seriously these days.

This more cautious note brought us to the matter of the Designated Person Ashore. "Are you it?" I asked. "Yes, I'm the Designated Person Ashore for ISM," replied Mark. "For ISPS, all our managers are trained as Company Security Officers, so the department as a whole is responsible for the regulations being followed. Either way, it is quite true that the buck stops here. If something bad happened and we did not act responsibly, I could be personally liable for a heavy fine or even prison."

"Safety is paramount to what we do. Fortunately, bad incidents are rare but they do happen and we are available 24/7 to help. Once I was just stepping on a bus to go home when the phone rang and it was a captain whose yacht had caught fire in mid-Atlantic. We were able to help and I am pleased to say the yacht reached port without assistance and with no injuries aboard."

Mark concludes: "I really believe our management programme is different from the others. Thanks to the experience of the team, plus the fact that we can call on other Burgess departments, we can cope with virtually anything that is thrown at us."

And as anyone who knows Mark Binnie will attest, he will cope with whatever comes his way with a very special blend of enthusiasm and good humour.