



## Eric Saint Plancat, SY *Tiara*, skipper

**F**renchman Eric Saint Plancat is the sort of man who makes you want to sit down and share a good bottle of wine. Hailing from Brittany, he has stories and experiences galore as a result of a career that started as a childhood hobby and led him to skippering a 56ft sloop as a teenager before becoming a Merchant Marine Officer then a Commercial Master 15,000GT a decade later. He has captained craft as diverse as tall ships and cargo carriers and there is little that he has not seen or done in his years afloat.

A man who speaks with passion, Saint Plancat is lucky to have found someone who shares his love for the sea, his high school sweetheart Céline. The couple have two children and when Saint Plancat is not running the 177ft *Tiara*, he lives aboard the family yacht and cruises the world.

He shares responsibility for *Tiara* with Pascal Pellat Finet on a two-month rotational basis. "It is the only way to go," he says. "For us, the benefits are obvious: half of the year is ours and we can have a real life with our family."

"But it also benefits the owner; he knows that he will always find a fresh and relaxed captain on board, happy to be here for him. We both know him well and his expectations. He doesn't need to repeat himself."

Since his first job at 18, Saint Plancat has single-mindedly accumulated experience through sailing all types of vessels: sailing yachts of course, but also cargo ships,



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tankers and harbour tugs. At the age of 26 he captained *Douce France*, the largest catamaran in the world at the time. By 30 he had turned his hand to the 1896 180ft three-masted tall ship *Belem*, France's flagship, and at 31 he was master of the 9,000-ton cargo ship that carried the Ariane 5 satellite launcher from Europe to French Guyana.

"The captain of a yacht or a ship has a huge responsibility; to the boat itself, but also to the human lives on board. He must be a leader, someone who the crew trusts and respects for who he is, not only for his position. The role demands good leadership but also a lot of humility."

In yachting, he says that the skipper's main challenges are to meet the guests' expectations. "Sometimes we have to be magicians and make the impossible happen without a hint to the guests of the difficulties. In a way, it was the same on cargo ships when you had to load everything you saw on the quay and had the feeling it would never fit in the hold!"

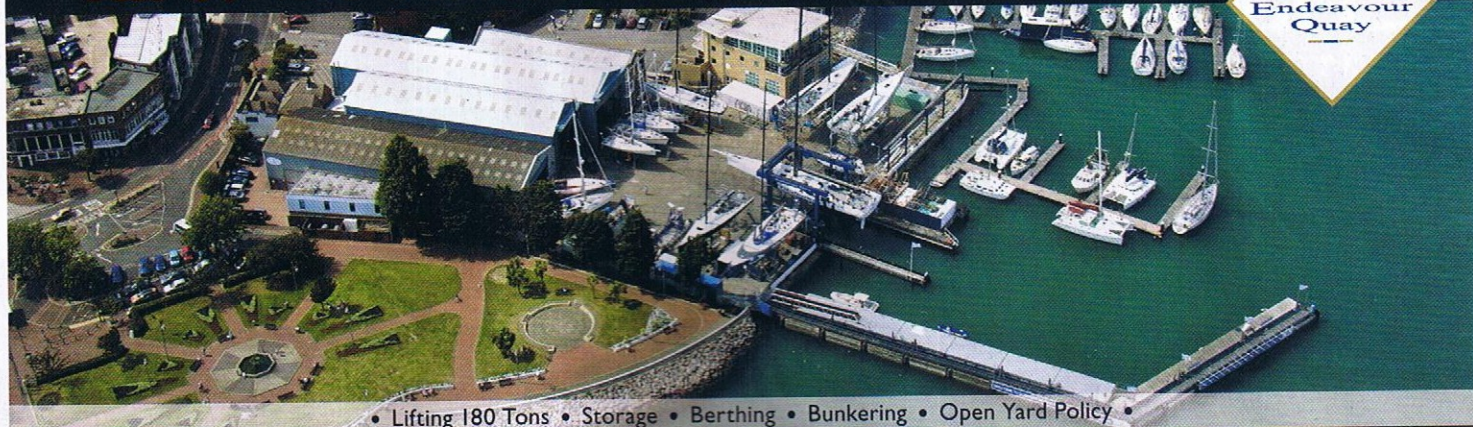
Saint Plancat is occasionally dismayed by some of the young crew of today: "They are getting bad habits and are losing some of the passion. Some nippers have indecent salary expectations and get desperate when the Internet is down for two days in the middle of the Pacific."

"My first job wasn't paid, I slept on deck, I didn't have a GPS and I loved it. To be successful in this game, you need competence, flexibility, leadership and humility and if you can't do this job with passion, then you shouldn't be doing it."

*Et voilà, a recipe for success.*

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