

UHURU is a Lymington yacht and the first adventure was the hardest...

We all have dreams and ambitions, and we all reach that 'certain age' when we start looking for more in life than a slow voyage into old age. Not all of us, unfortunately, can turn those dreams into reality. Having been successful in business I was in the very fortunate position of having choices and opportunity.

I found a passion for sailing later in life. While based in Sydney on business I started sailing in my spare time and managed a Day Skipper course. Armed with 'a qualification', I convinced the family to go on a Sunsail bareboat charter in the BVI's, the perfect training ground. Our antics over the next few years as we chartered in the Caribbean and Thailand seem horribly embarrassing now, but became the building blocks of a three-year adventure that took me 36,000 nm all over the east coast of the Americas, the Chilean Channels and Antarctica.

In 2004, having gained all this 'Sunsail experience' I announced to my wife, Beans, and two teenage daughters, Lucie and Sophie that I planned to sail around the world. As soon as the girls were busy at university, I argued, there would be a few years when they could spare me. Having established the principal, the realities started to kick in pretty quickly. One of the problems of success, choices and opportunities, is that just because you can, doesn't necessarily mean you should. We have all read stories about hopelessly inexperienced landlubbers setting off in a sieve armed with an AA road map. Sometimes they succeed, but I question whether they really cover themselves in glory. Luck is a fickle ally.

Avoiding the traps and learning to sail.

The way I saw it there were two traps that I could fall into. The first was buying a big boat, just because I could, and then courting disaster by setting off with high expectations and not a lot else. The risk of extreme embarrassment at best, or possible injury or worse, to family and friends, was not a risk I was prepared to take. The other was succumbing to the easy temptation of hiring a Professional Skipper and sitting on the aft deck sipping G&T while he ferries us around the world. Strangely the later, was my biggest fear, if I couldn't do this myself, what's the point? I might as well buy a first class ticket on '*The World*' and let them do it. It would be a lot more comfortable and much, much cheaper.

The plan was simple, first I had to learn to sail, proper sailing. After consulting a good friend and lifelong sailor, Dawson Penn, in 2005 I brought a small one-design racing keelboat, an *RS Elite*, and started racing. The thinking was that the fastest way to learn real sail and boat handling was on the racetrack. If I could sail in and out of Shepards Marina without an engine during the mayhem known as Cowes Week, it would go a long way towards equipping me with the skills I would need in the years ahead.

Deciding on a boat was simple really; I had always admired *Oysters* whenever I saw one in a marina. I'd love to be able to say that I compared all the various options, different rigs, hulls, and performance characteristics of the many yachts available on the market. But to be honest, after a cursory glance around the market I determined early on that I would buy an *Oyster*. After all this was to be a test of my own abilities and shortcomings, not the boats. Armed with an *Oyster*, I reasoned, there could be no excuses.

UHURU is born

In June 2006 Beans, my wife, and I signed a contract to build a 62ft *Oyster* to be called *UHURU*. (Swahili for Freedom. I was bought up in Kenya during the Mau Mau risings in the fifties, a very poignant word in our family). By this time I

had decided that sailing around the middle of the world was not challenging enough, I wanted to go via Antarctica and Cape Horn.



'Two years and thousands of mind-boggling decisions later...' **UHURU** came out of the fitting out shed into a snow storm.

Two years and thousands of mind-boggling decisions later we took delivery of a beautiful blue-hulled *Oyster 62*. I had relied heavily on the advice and help of many friends, but in particular I took on Richard Haworth of High Latitudes, a very experienced high latitude sailor and Ice Guide. His advice on all the little extras I would need to safely take a fibreglass boat down to Antarctica was invaluable and covered many areas of the build and outfitting, but was centered on a simple philosophy. Where possible, on all critical systems, have a backup of everything.

Two autopilots, installed and ready, two raw water inlet systems, two separate Racor Fuel filter systems, pre-heater on the water making system, two heating systems, re-enforcement on all key areas of the sail, extra high cut for good visibility and deep reefing, double bolt ropes on all sails, double leach lines on main and Genoa, plus stitched in sail hanks up the luff of the Genoa and staysail, hydraulic windlass and extra weight ground tackle, and so on, the list wasn't endless but certainly extensive.

When it came to outfitting her it all started again, two tenders, two outboard engines, three anchors (I used two Spade anchors and a Danforth), two eight man life rafts (one manual launch, one hydrostatic), two EPIRBs, two full sets of safety equipment and grab bags, two communication systems, diving equipment, compressor, 400m of floating line for tying off to rocks, two ice poles, etc, etc.

The spares and tools list was endless, everything from a spare propeller, bolted under one of the bunks, to mountains of spare filters and pumps, every critical component had to be covered. The spares list ran to five A4 pages and the tools list ran another two pages in addition to the extensive range of tools we already carried, including sledgehammers, crowbars, and a machete!

And, of course, the all-important 'Antarctic Expedition Permit' that ran into a stack of paper work several inches high. At times I wondered what we were getting into.