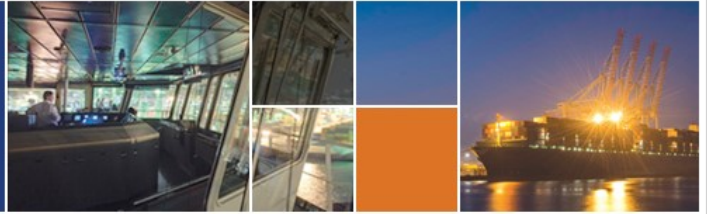




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A Day in the Life of a Ship Surveyor

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Captain Guy Webster of Nortica Marine SA is an independent marine consultant who has been supporting the Club for over 12 years. He frequently visits members' ships to carry out condition surveys on behalf of the Loss Prevention Department and recently sat down with Josefina Jofre, Commercial Director of Nortica Marine, to try and tie down the essence of a typical day in the life of a ship surveyor.

Can you explain who you are and what you do for the Club?

A Master mariner, I have over 40 years of marine experience beginning with a career at sea and including command experience. Since leaving the sea I've worked as a ship's pilot and a harbour master, worked for a law firm and in the offshore energy sector before finally setting up a marine consultancy.



What does a typical day involve?

An almost impossible question to answer, with no two days being the same. It's far removed from a 9 to 5 office job and has little in common with the routines of watchkeeping aboard ship.

In South America, for example, attendance on a vessel involved a flight from Buenos Aires to Manaus via Rio de Janeiro and 2 hours by taxi through the rain forest to a launch jetty. Having checked for lifejackets and VHF, and without a little trepidation, I boarded a wooden launch and sat in a corner of the deck house as we set off. After 20 minutes the deckhand presented a smartphone with coordinates from an AIS website and a photograph of the ship. After agreeing this was the correct vessel he disappeared and we continued navigating the Amazon River by smartphone!

What are some of the challenges that you have to face?

Vessels operate world-wide and schedules are usually driven and affected by charters, political and economic factors and the weather.

Some surveys are programmed well in advance but many are driven by other factors that often result in short notice being given to the surveyor. With the advent of the internet international travel can be arranged fairly easily although combining short notice with flexibility and good value can be a challenge at the best of times!

A key asset in ensuring smooth logistics is the member's local shipping agent. In most instances good cooperation, good communication and good support is available although sadly, on some occasions, I have suffered unnecessary inconvenience, embarrassment in front of the Club and Members and additional costs due to an agent's shortcomings. Timely communication between Owners, agents and surveyors certainly helps and most agents do try their best.

Do you have any scary anecdotes that you would like share with us?

These days it is extremely rare to encounter "scary" events. Most tonnage entered, or proposed for entry, with any of the International Group of P&I Clubs will be of a certain minimum standard, classed with a recognised classification society and registered with a reputable flag state, etc.

Perhaps my most scary experience involved a container ship in Colombia. The vessel itself had no major issues but attendance was interesting to say the least! A taxi driver met me at the airport and we set off for what I thought was to be a short drive to the coast, having forgotten that the 50 mile drive was through the northern end of the Andes Mountains. A lack of crash barriers and sheer cliffs kept me awake in the back of the cab but on top of this my poor driver was suffering from a heavy cold/severe hay fever and every 3 minutes or so would close his eyes, grab a tissue from a large box on the passenger seat and sneeze, before again opening his eyes to correct the steering as we veered into the path of oncoming trucks or toward the ravine below!

The drive lasted over 2 hours with the only respite being when we were frisked at police road blocks. I have never been so grateful to have a nervous teenage guard point a machine gun at me. Welcome relief on the drive from hell!

Any interesting stories from on board?

I recall surveying a Netherlands' flagged, family operated, general cargo vessel of which there are many still operating in Holland.

Outside shoes, never mind safety boots, were not permitted on the bridge so I entered and presented myself in safety helmet and socks. After a welcome I was pointed to a large table in the wheelhouse where I could "set up shop" and commence reviewing certificates.

As I reached under the desk to plug in my lap top I was shocked to see two large brown eyes and lots of white teeth, accompanied by a wagging tail... the ship's dog. A rare but welcome reminder that for crews of ships that we survey, the ship is also their home and when properly looked after and with international regulations observed, there is no reason why pets cannot be carried.

Another example was an inspection of a vessel laid up in Lithuania, and being asked by a somewhat embarrassed Chief Officer, if I really needed to start the rescue boat engine and test the launching crane. All became clear when I saw that a gull was nesting on a mooring rope coil next to the rescue boat crane and the fledgling chicks were nearly ready to fly the nest. A dynamic risk assessment was undertaken and based upon the numerous other issues identified testing of the rescue boat crane was not considered priority and the birds were left in peace.

What benefits are gained from carrying out surveys and inspections?

Acting as the Club's eyes and ears it is vitally important to empathise with ships' staff, the goal being to gain their confidence and put them at ease. This makes for a calm atmosphere and generally more information is forthcoming. I see and sense first-hand by looking, touching, testing and examining the structure, equipment and machinery of a vessel how she is being operated and whether the crew are actively engaged with their Safety Management Systems, a key tool of a safe and efficient vessel.

Finally, what do you believe the future holds for you and for ship condition surveys?

I used to be a pilot and always said that I would continue working as long as I could climb a pilot ladder. As a surveyor safe access is an integral

part of my inspection and can involve pilot ladders or combination ladders. Access to cargo holds and tanks also involves a degree of ladder work so as long as I remain in reasonable shape, I plan to continue working.

Another factor is staying up to date with new technologies, I have retained a valid Master's certificate which not only requires that I renew my medical certificate (for the ladders!) but also other certification such as GMDSS and ECDIS training. This has been invaluable as this area of technology is moving faster than legislation, particularly with ECDIS, and there are certainly potential gaps where risks exist and the surveyor needs to be alert to them.

The maritime industry continues to evolve and LNG fuels, hybrid technology, electric power and semi-autonomous and fully autonomous vessels are the future, whether traditionally trained seaman like it or not, and in this vein I recently attained accreditation to survey LNG fuelled ships.

I firmly believe that ship condition surveys will always have a place for seamanship, even in the broadest sense of the word, and the same values, including common sense and reasonableness, will apply whether surveying a sailing ship or an electric powered ferry.

The ultimate goal will always be to protect the interests of the Club's members by assisting their own (or other members') Masters and crews to maintain high standards and ideally minimise the risk of incidents and claims.



Article compiled by John Taylor

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