

GEOFF HOLT

YJA YACHTSMAN OF THE YEAR 2010

25 years as a national treasure

TO think we have been watching the magnificent Lord Nelson come and go from her home in Southampton for a quarter of a century, and her younger sister, the equally imposing Tenacious, is now celebrating her tenth year in service.

I recall being present at her keel-laying ceremony in 1996 in a vast warehouse in Woolston, the same warehouse



where Merlin engines had been built for Spitfire's during the war. Four years later she was launched and joined the Lord Nelson in active service and, such is the demand for their services, the pair have rarely paused to draw breath.

Between them, they have taken more than 36,000 people to sea. And of that number, 13,000 have been people with physical disabilities, giving them a genuinely unique opportunity to sail a tall ship alongside non-disabled crew and to participate in just about every activity on board, including being hoisted aloft in wheelchairs.

You need only to read the glowing testimonials from any of their participants on their website to understand the sense of esteem they are held in by their fans. And that loyalty

The former professional yachtsman who was paralysed in a swimming accident and inspired sailors when he became the first quadriplegic to sail the Atlantic.



Photos: Louise Pack

and love of the JST is evident as groups around the country raise much needed money to keep the two sisters afloat.

One excited crew member joining the STS Tenacious this month will be Louise Pack. Lou is an artist and film-maker and she will be undertaking a four-day voyage to capture images to be used in an exciting maritime art installation next year.

Inspired by the poems from "The Silence at the Son's End" by Nicholas Heiney. Lou told me: "Everyone aboard, whatever their ability will be part of the installation. Heiney's poem will be re-imagined in a sea-spray of pictures and sounds as the crew master their charge and their fears.

"The film will be a visual poem juxtaposing images of people pushing

their boundaries, the unyielding demands of the ship and the unforgiving elements themselves. Art and the sea are old friends, but art moves on".

The ten minute finished work will be projected on to a 360 degree panoramic dome in Weymouth during the Olympic and Paralympic sailing regattas and during the Cultural Olympiad in 2012.

As part of the JST's celebrations this year, both vessels will be visiting a number of ports around the country and, during August and September, the Lord Nelson will be sailing down the east coast from Ipswich to Great Yarmouth. There are still some berths available and there are bursaries available which, if successful, could part fund your voyage costs.

www.jst.org.uk

LET ME KEEP MY INDEPENDENCE

WHILST the public perception is that the JST caters for all disabled people, some people with learning disabilities are excluded if deemed unable to follow safety instructions from permanent crew.

And people like myself who use powered wheelchairs are also denied physical access.

I think it is about time a 150-foot merchant vessel could accommodate them.

I should clarify that powered wheelchair users are welcome, however they must leave their chair behind and use the ship's lightweight wheelchair.

But that completely misses the point; I'm independent and I don't feel disabled in my electric wheelchair – the moment I'm in a lightweight manual-wheelchair, I feel disabled again.

Hopefully new CEO Alex Lochrane will put this on his "to do" list. If so, I'm at the front of the queue please.

But personal disappointment aside - because I'm desperate to go on a voyage with them - the JST is a national treasure and I have yet to hear a bad word from anyone who has sailed with them.