



LEFT Steaming away from Cape Adare on a good day. **ABOVE** Inside Shackleton's Cape Royds hut. **BELOW L-R** Shackleton's hut, like all the historic huts of the Ross Sea, is maintained by NZ's Antarctic Heritage Trust; What better place for a "polar plunge" than in front of Scott's Hut at Cape Evans. **RIGHT** If deadlines rule your life, you may miss the chance to hang out with your mates!



Cold deadlines

WHAT BETTER WAY TO SPEND TIME STUCK IN PACK ICE, GOING BACKWARDS, THAN TO CONTEMPLATE THE MEANING OF DEADLINES

As I write this, we are stopped dead in heavy pack ice about 40 miles to the east of Cape Adare, at the entrance to the Ross Sea in Antarctica. We are a long way from nowhere and have been here five hours so far, well sort of, as we are drifting backwards with the ice at 1.5kts.

We are not in a desperate situation, far from it. We're on holiday aboard the 2500-tonne Russian ice

ship *Spirit of Enderby*, a sister ship to the *Akademik Shokalskiy* which was trapped in the ice for weeks last year off Commonwealth Bay in Antarctica. They had no choice!

That incident led to an international rescue effort by three other icebreakers and made world news. At the moment our visibility is at times less than 50m, with a 30 to 35kt wind driving snow drifts. Yes it is very cold and the water temperature is about

-1.5°C. We are not even in a dangerous situation and many, including me, are loving the moment.

Our captain is an experienced ice master who has been with this ship nearly 20 years. He decided that it was prudent to stop and wait for better visibility in the 9/10ths first year pack ice conditions. The ice edge and open water is expected 15 miles south of us. Our ultimate destination is to Scott's and Shackleton's huts at the bottom of the

Ross Sea, just about as far south as you can go.

COLD WAR LUXURY

This whole voyage and the experience it delivers is quite an adventure and for me, on this ship, it is like a breath of fresh air! I last served on these tough Russian ships, with this same Captain, onboard the *Akademik Shokalskiy* back in 1999. (I bought my own little 600-tonne ice ship *Sir Hubert Wilkins* a year later). I had forgotten

“Only the Russian political officer (KGB) on board, who reported direct to the Kremlin, *knew the combination of the door lock and the secret codes for transmission within*”

how competent they are. Originally Russian research/spy ships from the cold war era, they were converted to expedition 3-star tourist vessels more than 30 years ago.

For the past 10 years I have headed south each summer as expedition leader on the modern and much larger 5-star 4000-tonne ship *MV Orion*, with 100 passengers. It has been an awesome 10 years.

The deadlines and tight itinerary of the *Orion* would never have allowed us the time to stop dead in the ice and simply wait. In fact

we would not have even penetrated this far into it, as we had been doing over the last 36 hours, slicing through soft ice and cruising up open leads, with Adelie and emperor penguins about, while pure white snow petrels dart around in the low light. This is the materiel for big memories - serene, exciting, stunning hours ticking by, moments in time where you feel like you are on another planet.

For this our small group of 48 guests the fun continues while we sit here. Now they are below listening to

renowned historian David Harrowfield describe the heroic age of exploration through the eyes of Shackleton and Scott. Both experienced these very same conditions, with their deadlines all about beating the onset of a new season, which could and did cost lives when or if they got it wrong.

My copy deadlines for this column run out today. They come around all too fast and I was wondering what to write. This one will be despatched shortly via Iridium satellite email, sent from a shared computer in a

little room behind the bridge. It was once a top secret area, even to the Captain. Only the Russian political officer (KGB) on board, who reported direct to the Kremlin, knew the combination of the door lock and the secret codes for transmission within.

On *Orion* I had 24-hour satellite streaming internet, Facebook and email direct to my computer in my room, complete with marble bathroom and satellite TV. Did I mention the 5-star dining? I can't say I did not enjoy that, I did. But I can say that for the first time in a long time, on this ship in



OPPOSITE PAGE How could I sell such a beautiful little ship called *ICE*? Only if my next dreams are bigger than the boat and at the moment they are growing!
ABOVE Two-hundred-thousand king penguins on one beach is an impressive sight at Macquarie Island on the way south.
LEFT The only good reason in my mind to sell a boat is to get a plane...hmm? Dream materiel is this classic Grumman! Jane is now learning to fly and the horizon is calling – maybe?
BELOW Hey! No pushing in the back.

Antarctica, I feel as if I am really back adventuring. It's great.

We have a full 10 days yet to play out in the Ross Sea before we head north to New Zealand and the end of our 30-day expedition. Only snippets of world news filter onto the ship, heightening our sense of isolation in the heart of Antarctica. It makes it easy to enjoy the here and now. Like the crew, we know deadlines are running out for the Russian economy and President Putin, with the rouble crashing through the floor.

As with all adventures this one has an unknown outcome but for now there are no deadlines. All are happy to sit tight and enjoy the great white surrounding us. Even the two snowmen

on the aft deck have a smile. The Russian crew sing about their US-dollar pay packets tripling in value. The guests are all smiling as they contemplate how much warmer we are compared to Shackleton. I'm smiling 'cause I have a story for my column which popped up right on deadline.

Sometimes, even at the bottom of the world you cannot get away from deadlines. So what about you? Have you ever dreamed of heading to the "real Antarctica" to experience the heroic age of exploration in your own true little expedition ship without deadlines? If so you better be quick!

There are strict new Polar regulations coming into force in the next few

years. The deadline for these sturdy Russian ships to sail south may finally run out in 2018. Their modern replacements may be big, fast and fancy...but they may never have the time to stop in the ice.

BIGGER, BETTER, BEST?

I guess it would be fair to say that most people buying this magazine are men. Quite a few women would get to read it too, many with great enthusiasm dreaming of what could be a great day out, or even a new lifestyle. I never categorise anyone, least of all me, but blokes like boats right! We are all different, which gives the world its rich colour, but "bloke" and "boat" even sound similar.

I reckon it's also fair to say that us blokes who own a boat are also thinking the three "Bs" - Bigger, Better, Best? It is simply human nature. You can love your boat now but there is always room for another one in the future? Yes a little bit Bigger, could make it a whole lot Better and yes, that boat over there may be the Best you have seen and wouldn't every bloke like to own it!

Well here is the good news. If you own a boat, any type of boat, you are one of the lucky ones and have the best escape vehicle for this sometimes crazy world and the pressure that often falls on the shoulders of men in society. Yours may not be the biggest or the best boat in the world, but if you keep it safe you are on your way

to a good day out and an adventure when you need it.

I consider myself lucky for many reasons and one is that I have never suffered depression. Many blokes do and often don't talk about it. If you think you know someone who does or looks a bit down, ask them out for a day on the water. It may just change their life or even save it! Out on the water is the one place I know where you can really clear your head and forget about everything, except maybe that bigger or better boat.

YES? NO?

"Eeny, meeny, miny, moe," one of my boats has to go?

Wow...sitting in my shed in Hobart is the best 7.8m open whaleboat you have ever seen, built like a

piece of furniture and with memories of a 4000-mile voyage across the Pacific. How could I sell that?

I just bought *Iki*, my Bayliner 2359 fast dive boat for magnetometry work in Tonga, so that is staying 'cause the job is just about to begin. My 15.2m motorsailer *Ice* has to be the best SUV of the sea you could ever own and is home and mother ship for my Tonga treasure hunting, so how can I sell her? But now I have *Betty* the most amazing Tradewind 35 ocean-voyaging yacht, the type of sailboat you could own forever; she is a real keeper. Something has to happen but I want them all.

Blokes and their boats hey...big decisions ahead. Hmm... ■

