

A large black yacht hull is the central focus, reflecting the sky and surrounding structures. A surveyor in a dark blue uniform and white hard hat stands in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background shows a shipyard with various equipment and other vessels under construction.

# SURVEYING LARGE CREWED YACHTS

The focus of this article is on the process and the logistics involved in surveying large crewed yachts, rather than on the practicalities of the survey. The areas of inspection are basically the same as on any pre purchase survey, albeit larger, and more technically involved with regard to machinery systems. Of course the time frame on Super Yacht Surveys is much longer.

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One question I often get asked is how to get the business, or how to make the jump from surveying small pleasure craft to larger vessels. The answer is consistently down to the trust from the client in the Surveyor's ability to carry out the job. For which the Surveyor will need to prove his track record with references etc. It can be a chicken and egg situation, unless the Surveyor has worked for one of the larger surveying companies or had the opportunity to assist on large yacht surveys and gain an insight that way.

One of the most fundamental differences when surveying large crewed yachts, is that the Surveyor very rarely, if ever deals with the principal. Communications lay with brokers, managers, PA's, lawyers and technical representatives; therefore, the approach needs to be very businesslike and organised. We have found that by working closely with the seller's broker, we get better results by driving the process forward ourselves with regard to organising sea trials and dry docking etc.

The following describes the stages involved in a large yacht pre purchase survey; although essentially the same as any pre purchase survey, there are some critical differences to consider.

### THE CONTRACT

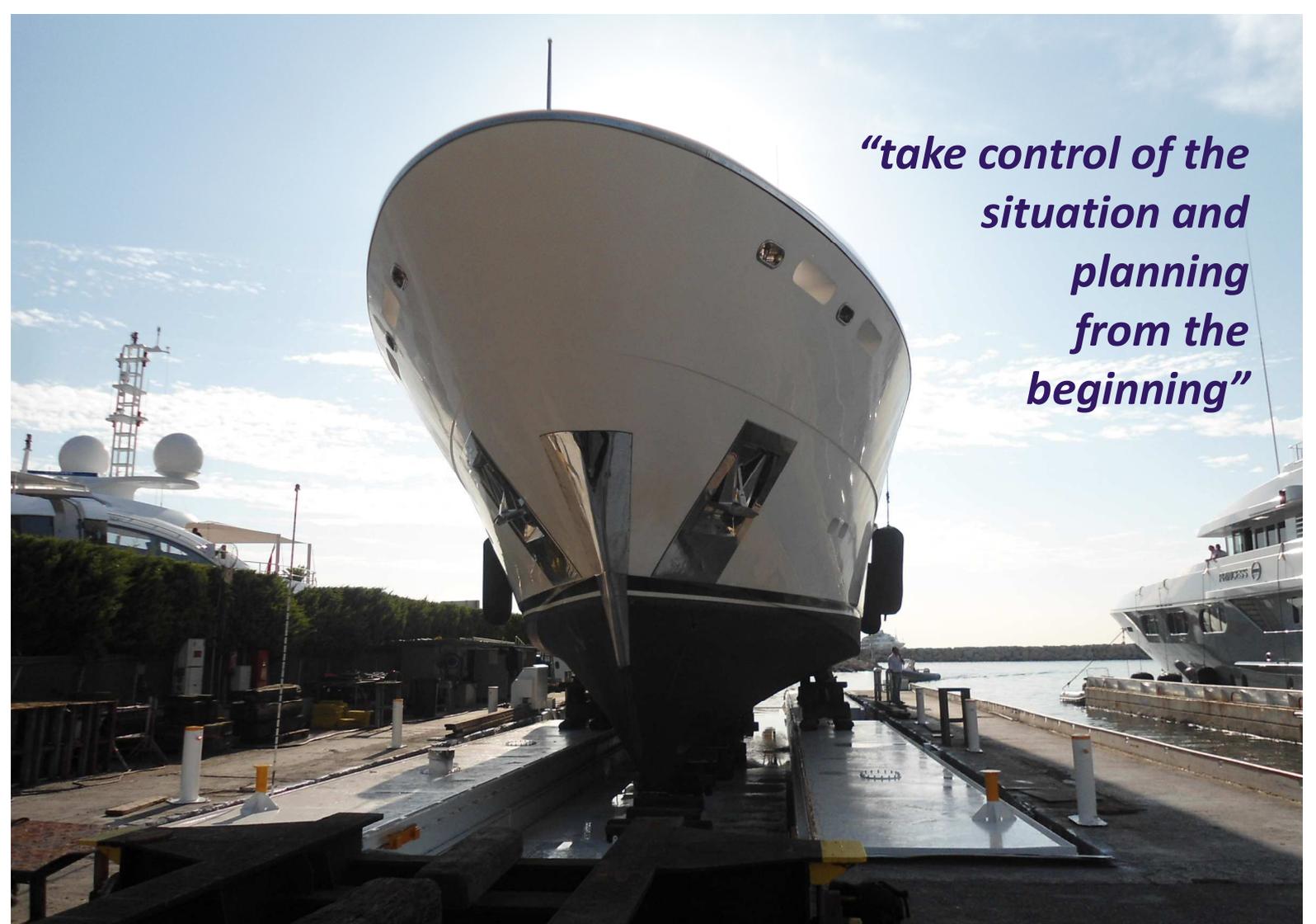
Having won the job the Surveyor needs to be absolutely sure to have his numbers right and that the client knows exactly what he is paying for; it is often better to give a full package price including, fees, travel expenses, Oil a Analysis, Engine Techs for the Sea Trial etc, and include a quote from the Ship Yard for dry dock and yard expenses. It is important that the client is clear as to whom, why and when he has to make payments. The Surveyor should also check that his PI will cover the job; some PI providers are happy to arrange extra cover for *one off* surveys where the vessel is of a higher than normal value; or in the event that the client's legal representatives request higher cover. The reality is; the Large Yacht Surveyor should have a good legal team on his side! Once the survey schedule is firmed up, the Surveyor should ask for emailed copies of the vessel's statutory documents, technical specifications and any drawings that might be available.

### THE CREW

Although the crew in place during the survey can range from a single temporary Captain onboard, to a fully crewed commercial charter yacht with upwards of twenty crew; it is important to establish a working relationship, especially with the Captain and Chief engineer, as this will make the Surveyor's job a lot easier for opening up areas, collecting service histories, access to work lists etc. If possible contact should be made directly with the Captain in advance to discuss requirements, being mindful that if the sale goes through the crew could be out of a job; so be sympathetic. Unfortunately there can also be an air of resentment with the Surveyors' arrival onboard; he is after all witnessing the crew's level of maintenance and professional competence. The Surveyor should try to remain objective at all times, and unless something dangerous is found, his opinion should be kept in his notes. Having said that, the vast majority of the crews I have dealt with have been very helpful and professional, with the added benefit of the occasional great lunch onboard!

A large white yacht is shown on the water, viewed from a low angle. The yacht has multiple decks and a prominent mast. The background shows a blue sky and a hilly coastline. Overlaid on the right side of the image is a quote in white italicized text.

*“the sea trial is where the surveyor is everybody's centre of attention”*



***“take control of the situation and planning from the beginning”***

## **THE SEA TRIAL**

It is important to realise that the sea trial for a large yacht survey is usually the first and most important stage of the survey; this is due to the standard contract conditions between buyer and seller stating; *if the buyer does not declare his rejection in writing within 24hrs of the sea trial due to the vessel not performing as expected, it is deemed that the vessel has been accepted subject to the final condition survey.*

The sea trial is where, the Surveyor, is everybody's centre of attention. On a recent sea trial we had the owner's team onboard; consisting of a lawyer, a broker, and two technical representatives, plus from the buyer's team was; a broker, the Captain and chief engineer from his existing yacht, and two technical representatives. It is important to remember that during

the survey the only person the Surveyor should report his findings to is the instructing client's direct representative.

The sea trial is usually scheduled for four hours maximum, it may seem a long time but there is a lot to get through! Engine manufactures technicians will be onboard to make computer diagnostic analysis of the engines, oil samples need to be taken of main machinery, and there may be vibration analysis technicians onboard as well. The Surveyor will have to take sound level checks throughout the vessel, along with the standard manoeuvres, ground tackle test, and tender launch and recovery. Normally an interim report is issued within 24hrs to confirm the survey can continue *or less favourably*, so that the sale will be cancelled in the *rare* event that major faults are discovered or lack of expected performance.

## **THE DRY DOCKING**

On very large yachts, the buyer's representative may consider not to have the vessel dry docked. Especially if the yacht has recently been out of the water for a class inspection; nevertheless it is sometimes prudent to have a diver carry out an underwater inspection with perhaps photographs or video. If the vessel is to be hauled, it is important to have a very clear agreement with the yard's project manager as to the schedule and requirements for the inspection; for instance, there may be technicians scheduled for a UTM inspection, or for shaft clearance measurements on the tail shafts or stabilisers; here again, I have found it is better to take control of the situation and planning from the beginning to ensure a complete hull inspection is carried out to satisfaction.

## CONDITION SURVEY

Once the vessel is re launched the survey can conclude along the lines of any pre purchase marine survey; with in some cases the engagement of specialist consultants; particularly with regard to the vessel's Audio Visual and IT systems, AV and IT are very specialist areas where the onboard systems can be extensive and may have had several upgrades.

Another area which the Surveyor might consider using a consultant is in the accommodation; especially where Italian marble bathrooms with gold plated taps, and rare wood veneers *might* not be his speciality. Here too, something missed could be very costly! We are fortunate to have an ex large yacht Chief Stewardess to carry out interior cosmetic inspections, ensuring the required attention to detail.

I have been asked is it feasible to carry out a condition survey of a large

yacht, single handed? The issue here is not about the Surveyor's level of competence, but rather the time involved. The contractual agreements involving large yacht sales usually have very tight time frames; so to survey a 40m yacht by a single Surveyor and to write the report may simply take too long for a client's requirements.

## THE REPORT

The client will almost always ask for the full condition report within 48hrs of the survey completion, often with an interim defects report forwarded to the client's representative as soon as possible. This is where pre planning is important, essentially the Surveyor needs to write the report as he proceeds with the survey, not leaving it all to the end. Sitting down with a pile of notes, some several days old, and a few hundred pictures to sift through will just create pressure; and pressure makes for poor reporting! Having said that,

pressure may need to be applied to sub contractors to provide *their* reports. Annexes containing reports from engine techs, oil sample analysis, hull UTM and any other consultants engaged should be added to the final report. As far as the style of the report is concerned, I feel it is important to remain objective, any personal like or dislike of the interior styling or any other aspect of the vessel is irrelevant. The Surveyor is required to simply report on the condition of the yacht as found; however, I do feel that the report should reflect the vessel's purpose as a luxury yacht, and should have more depth to it than for instance, a survey of a commercial work boat.

Finally it is worth remembering that although a yacht is a luxury item, and may have a market value in the millions, often loaded with lots of expensive toys, and high tech gadgets; the surveyor's first priority is to ask himself, *'is the vessel safe, is it seaworthy and fit for purpose?'*



*“the Surveyor's first priority  
is to ask himself  
'is it safe?'"*