



Keeping it Ship Shape

In 1997, Paul and Angie Hallatt set off around the world with their baby son Tom on the Expo 98 rally. When they returned, Paul looked around for a boat-related role. He started selling yacht-shaped duvets, sold out at his first boat show, and never looked back

In the late 1990s, Paul and Angie Hallatt had moved out of London in order to be close to the coast. Paul, trained in product engineering, had moved on from his job in biscuit sales and marketing to work for Fisons. Angie is a GP. They had a Dufour 2800 moored at Pin Mill in Suffolk and a small baby son. They had discussed longer sailing trips, but felt that an Atlantic crossing would mean a lot of time away from home even though the crossing itself is only a few weeks.

Then Paul picked up a yachting magazine and read about Jimmy Cornell's plans for Expo 98 – a round-the-world rally which would start and finish in Lisbon, returning in time for the grand opening of the Portuguese Expo 98 in May 1998. In the same magazine he saw an advertisement for an Atlantic 55, a Greek-built blue water cruiser whose five cabins would give plenty of room for the Hallatts to take paying passengers – the only way they could afford to do the trip.

Even now, more than 20 years after their return, Paul's enthusiasm for the trip is undiminished. But when he set off he wasn't so sure about the enthusiasm of his family. Tom, as a beautiful blonde baby setting off to be one of the world's youngest circumnavigators, had attracted lots of

media attention, as a result of which Henri Lloyd, who didn't do children's wear, had offered to make Tom a suit of yellow Goretex waterproofs.

"Those waterproofs saved our trip," says Paul. *Ocean Dream* was between Madeira and Gran Canaria when they were hit by 72kt winds and ferocious seas. Two of the yachts in the rally were dismasted. "I was helming, double harnessed on, and Tom was asleep in Angie's arms – they were both clipped on too. And we fell off a wave, the bows buried in the water, and as we came up 4ft of water swept over the foredeck and into the cockpit, smashing the dodgers. Tom woke up, but all he said was 'Tom wet now'... and then he went straight back to sleep. After that, I knew we'd be ok.

"Children follow the lead of the parents. We never raised our voices to a child on the boat and we told Tom 'The more *Ocean Dream* bounces, the happier she is.'" Clearly Tom was convinced by this, because in Gran Canaria, when most of the crew were happy to be in calm waters, he told his parents "Poor *Ocean Dream* – she's not laughing any more." Now in his 20s, he did the ARC last year and is still enjoying being bounced around.



Left, the poster of Ocean Dream's voyage was created by the late Guy Todd. Above and right, Tom' and his Henri Lloyd oilies – this is his second set – and one of many press cuttings



The Hallatts' voyage continued via the Caribbean, Panama, Galapagos, and across the south Pacific, which Paul describes as "ten times easier than sailing in the Med" and recalls that the Pacific was so named as it is the "Passive Ocean" – in the right latitudes! In the Marquesas Tom fell eight feet off a small footbridge into a dry stream bed, hitting his head on a lump of coral. By extraordinary coincidence a team of plastic surgeons was on the island and were able to treat him successfully. The family decided to drop out of the rally and continue at their own pace, without the steady stream of paying passengers.

By the time they got to the Great Barrier Reef, however, it was clear that they were soon going to become a bigger family. They took a shortcut home through Suez and their second son Henry was born just a week and a half after their return to the UK. Henry completed his first circumnavigation earlier this year as paid crew on an Oyster 575 – still before his 21st birthday.

They could have walked straight back into their previous

roles but Paul's adventurous spirit saw him casting around for alternative activities. When *Ocean Dream* was sold he took up paramotoring (powered paragliders) and for a while made flight computers, working with a partner who was an "electronics whizz". But the complexities of electronic equipment made them vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy, and so he turned to the lowest-tech product he could think of.

"Sleeping in a triangle-shaped berth on a boat with a rectangular duvet means that you have loads of extra warmth just where you don't want it in a warm cabin – over your feet," says Paul. You could buy triangular duvets at that time, but they were all custom-made. "I worked out that the duvets just needed to be two metres long, two metres wide, and 80cm wide at the bottom which is enough to go over two people's feet. They didn't need to be an exact fit for the berth, they needed to fit the people sleeping on the bed."

He got a stack of duvets made up, took them to the



The Ship Shape team at their base in Catfield, Norfolk. From left, Rosie Krafft (sales and customer service adviser), Amy Cook (leisure sector manager), Luke Graves (warehouse dispatch and maintenance officer), Paul Hallatt (proprietor and director), and Matt Nudd (senior commercial manager). Above, the business took off with the creation of shaped duvets

Boating business

Below, Paul demonstrates the technique for measuring for a custom mattress. Right, this Air-Flow Marine+ is one of the styles of mattress: foam, pocket sprung or air flow. Paul says that the majority of boat cushions are too firm to sleep on – they should allow your hips to sink in yet be supported



2006 London Boat Show, and sold out. That's how Ship Shape bedding was born, and although some of the company's products have got more complex and expensive subsequently, they still follow the same principles: deliver what people really want on a boat and make it good quality, effective and simple for the customers.

"My principle is that we should make what the customer wants to buy, rather than making them buy what we want to make," says Paul.

The next step, once more following customer demand, was to create sheets which really fit boat beds. Anything using conventional sheeting would have to be made to measure, so Paul started the hunt for a fabric with two-way stretch which could be turned into sheets in a small range of standard shapes that fit 95% of boat beds. He found what he needed at a company which makes ladies' underwear. The resulting sheets not only fit your berth, but are smooth and comfortable to sleep on. At the next boat show, they sold out again.

"Before we sell any new product, I use it at home for at least six months," says Paul. "That way, I know that it just works. For yachties, it's all about practicality." He also takes advice on physiology from Angie; as a doctor who also sails, she can provide knowledgeable support. Nowadays they live on the Norfolk Broads, sail a traditional gaff rigged half-decker and have a launch to go from their home to the local village pubs.

Ship Shape added galleyware to their range, including unbreakable glasses, melamine crockery and even folding



saucepans. But the next big step was into production of mattresses. "Numerous customers had asked if we could bring the same sensible approach to mattresses," says Paul. "But I resisted it for two or three years. Traditionally, making a custom mattress means going out and measuring the boat, which can take a whole day and just isn't cost-effective. So we had to find a way where we could rely on customers to measure up. And eventually we came up with a method which is absolutely accurate, completely foolproof and very simple. You literally cannot get it wrong."

The measuring kit basically consists of a very large sheet of pre-cut brown paper and a set of instructions. To measure up, remove all the existing cushions, put the paper in the berth, and crease all the way around the edge with your fingers. Then mark that line with a pen, mark any splits needed with a pen, and use a ruler printed on the edge of the instructions to measure the slope of the hull. That's it.

"Really, the only thing that can go wrong is that the mattress fits so well you can't tuck the sheet in," says Paul. But he acknowledges that manufacturing custom mattresses is quite a complex process and has chosen to keep all production in the UK. "That way, if anything goes wrong, say a customer suddenly remembers that a chain pipe has to go through the mattress, we can deal with it fairly easily."

Ship Shape's most recent development is its ActiveCool bedding, which actually conducts heat away from your body. You can sleep directly on the pillowcases and mattress covers for the strongest effect, or cover them with a sheet in cooler weather. The fabric has attracted interest from ladies of a certain age who suffer from hot flushes and night sweats. Paul's not quite ready to go into this very different market yet, but with his love of problem solving, he may just find a way.

■ Ship Shape offers CA members 10% off all bedding, DRY-mat, mattresses and toppers. Find out more at <http://shipshapebedding.co.uk>



Camilla Herrmann