

LEEWARD ISLANDS

Going well in Guadeloupe

Former superyacht captain Fabrice Maitre's investment in a successful Caribbean refit facility has set out a new model for first-class service in a 'remote' location

BELINDA SNELL REPORTS



IMM's floating dock at Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe



IMM promises European-standard technical services

TRADITIONALLY, THE CARIBBEAN has a less well-established reputation than Europe or the USA for delivering high quality and technical support – something that has tended to be a psychological barrier for investors looking to set up a commercial superyacht interest within the region.

But according to Fabrice Maitre, a former superyacht captain who founded a Caribbean refit facility in Guadeloupe in 2010, that industry perception is now beginning to change.

Maitre believes strongly that the success of his company – International Marine Management (IMM) – is helping to break down the barriers and perceived differences between Caribbean and European/American superyacht refit and maintenance.

“Limitations that once stood in the way of more ‘remote’ refit locations no longer apply,” he argues. “The highest quality

services are no longer just found in Europe and the USA.”

In fact, Maitre and his fellow investors – Jean-Michel Beron and Norina Edelman – go so far as to promise European-standard technical services at its Leeward Islands site which are “equivalent in terms of quality, reactivity and service, along with 100 per cent dedication to the vessel”.

Small differences

“We may need a bit more preparation here in the Caribbean, and working ahead is particularly important for us, but it is essentially the same as being in Europe,” says Maitre.

“Frankly, there are more similarities than differences when conducting refit work in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean – the jobs are the same, the urgency is the same and the required quality is the same. The main differences in working in non-traditional refit locations these days tend

to be differences of degree rather than of substance.

“For example, in almost all refit periods, no matter where you are, you will definitely be required to order parts for delivery. In Europe, a refit that is taking place in the South of France, for instance, might require parts from Holland and the subsequent delivery time will generally be 24 to 48 hours.

“If that same exact part needs to be sent to us here in Guadeloupe or Martinique, the delivery time will be somewhere between 48 and 72 hours. So, the difference is minimal, although planning does need to be followed closely.”

Maitre and his team have also set up additional facilities in Martinique to ensure that IMM is always conveniently close to the centre of winter yacht charter activity in the Caribbean.

IMM's Guadeloupe facility is capable of berthing yachts up to 200m and, between the sites in Guadeloupe and Martinique,

it can take drying vessels up to 180m. IMM also specialises in remote refits and can follow vessels around the world, allowing it to complete routine technical maintenance without tampering with the yacht's overall schedules.

Advance scheduling

“Project management is key,” says Norina Edelman. “And, although some jobs, such as full repaints for example, will immobilise the vessel for longer periods of time, the majority of works can be organised around the vessel's schedule without taking the vessel out of service.”

“Imagine a 60m yacht that has a work list ready for the winter season. Those jobs can be quoted in advance, scheduled in advance, and then completed at the yacht's location pursuant to the yacht's schedule, all by the same remote team. That is far more efficient, both in terms of cost and time. ■■■▶



**IMM founder
Fabrice Maitre**



**Co-investor,
Norina Edelman**



Jean-Michel Baron

**International Marine
Management's dock in Guadeloupe**



“With many vessels having set periods of down-time during their Caribbean season, completing maintenance and refit work, or even planning and scheduling an upcoming technical period, will increase the efficiency of the yacht. This is because it uses existing availability, thereby reducing the time out of operation later. Dedicating sufficient time in order to blueprint and schedule a yacht’s maintenance plan can save significant amounts of money and time in the future.”

One particular challenge facing non-traditional maintenance and refit locations is the fact that they tend to have fewer subcontractors present and available. However, bringing in subcontractors from outside the immediate area is nothing new in an industry that has always relied on specialist workers and unusual requests – something that IMM has been keen to capitalise on.

“In the Caribbean, there is more need to have expertise

in-house,” explains Jean-Michel Beron, who has carried out significant work on 80m-plus yachts in both the Med and in the Caribbean. “In Europe, if the yard doesn’t have the skills in-house, there is often a company within 100km that does. In the Caribbean, however, that isn’t always the case. So the more we can do in-house, the better we are able to serve clients.”

A need for change

Although various models for non-location-specific refit and maintenance management have been promoted in the past, with relatively limited uptake, they have tended to remain in the predictable yacht servicing locations around Europe. This, however, is the very essence of what IMM feels needs to change – take the service capability to where the yachts are, rather than just haul them back to Europe.

There are now myriad options when choosing to refit in a non-traditional location, or

to use a remote service that can travel to the yacht.

Though the choice can be based purely on location, there are clear benefits that yards in these areas can offer, such as cheaper haul-out and labour costs, as well as increased flexibility and availability.

And carrying out the work away from Europe doesn’t have to mean you lose out on important fiscal benefits. Guadeloupe and Martinique are both technically part of France, which means that commercial vessels are not subject to VAT, and customs allows *perfectionnement actif* (also known as temporary importation). This means pleasure vessels can avoid VAT and local taxes on repairs. Goods can also be imported for yachts in transit without paying VAT or local taxes.

“Yachting should be about convenience to the yacht owner and adhering to their ideal schedule,” insists Maitre. “More and more superyachts have

evolved to exist without a home port, and many of the world’s yacht owners have adopted a multi-continent lifestyle without a fixed ‘home’.

“In line with this, now is the time for the industry to rethink how it looks at refit and maintenance with regards to location, or rather the flexibility in location that a yacht deserves, without having to compromise on quality of service.”

“The refit sector needs to respond a lot better to a yacht’s technical needs on a yacht’s own terms,” continues Maitre, who has managed projects on some of the world’s largest vessels. “You have to take into account two things – where the yacht actually is and its availability. Through our location in the Caribbean, we are able to provide an alternative and attractive solution to yachts during the winter season, when many of the fleet have available time alongside.” **SB**