

# AN INTERVIEW WITH CAPTAIN ALESSANDRO GALOTTO

A conversation with the master of Carnival Pride

by

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Captain Alessandro Galotto is the master of the Carnival Pride of Carnival Cruise Lines. A native of Genoa, Italy, Captain Galotto has had extensive experience at sea including work on cargo ships and later on ships carrying immigrants between Europe and South America. Now in his third decade with Carnival, he is energetic, personable and approachable - - a professional who laughs easily and who seems to delight in his work. Our discussion covered three areas: the evolution of Carnival; the role of a cruise ship captain; and the recent deployment of the Pride to Baltimore, Maryland.

## *The Changing Face of Carnival*

Captain Galotto began his career with Carnival Cruises in 1982 as Third Officer on the line's first ship, Mardi Gras. He was subsequently promoted and has commanded many of the ships in the Carnival fleet including Carnival Sensation, Carnival Ecstasy, and Carnival Legend. Much has changed since his days on Mardi Gras. "Mardi Gras was built in the 1950s as the Empress of Canada. She had been used for transfers from Europe and England to

North America. Those ships were built to last 50 or 60 years. The thickness of the plates was like two inches. The propulsion was basic - - Mardi Gras was a [steam] turbine ship. At that time, fuel consumption was not as much of an issue as now. So, turbines were the most common. In fact, [Carnival's first three ships] the Mardi Gras, the Carnivale, the Festivale, were all turbine ships. The Tropicale in 1981, was the first modern ship we had."

"Technically, the ships were completely different [then today's cruise ships]. They were smaller. We carried 1,200 passengers on the Mardi Gras. Here, we have 2,600 or 2,700 and the Carnival Dream [which will enter service in the Fall 2009] is going to have even more."

"We have different workers. We went from a crew who were mostly from the Central American countries and the islands to a much more extended version. We have people from 50 or 60 different nationalities. Now, the majority of the crew is from the Far East - - Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, India - - with a mix of everybody else. Also, after the fall of the Soviet Union, we have a lot of workers from the hotel

industry from the Eastern European countries."

"The whole concept of cruising was different. Everything was different from the clientele to what we offered. I went from Costa, which at that time was upper class cruising, to Mardi Gras, which was a party boat, a true fun ship -- two completely different worlds."

"Of course, life moved on and everything changed. The food and beverage, which is a big operation and today the biggest part of the [cruise] experience, wasn't before. It was basic food, nice but not so fancy. Now, we have an extensive food and beverage operation. [The Pride has recently introduced a flexible dining option which] we are testing to give more choices to the guests."

"We have a sector of the market price-wise. Nevertheless, we want to offer what the upper sector [of the cruise industry offers] in proportion. You can't compare [Carnival to the luxury brands] but we give our sector of the market a little bit of that experience. That is why we added the supper club, which is something that came out with the Spirit class, alternative fine dining, which we did not have."

"Entertainment has gone way beyond what was expected 30 years ago with four dancers and one singer. Now, we have a full cast. We [recently] added a new show on this ship so that we have three production shows."

"It is an evolving market so you have to change. We are guest orientated. There is no other way. The guest wants something and you have to try to give it to him. So, that is how we evolve."

"We took away some of the 'fun', but because the public changed. In the old days, we had toga parties, beer drinking contests, pillow fights. People are not really into [those activities] anymore. So, we had to substitute other activities. That is why people [who have cruised with] other companies and come on their first [Carnival] cruise, sometimes [say]: 'I thought it was just for younger crowds, basically a party boat' and then they have to change their views."

"We started as a party boat and there was this common knowledge in the public that Carnival meant only fun. We are [now] more complex than that. We have extended [our] market through all the sectors of the public. We are family orientated -- we have established programs for kids of all ages, two years up to 18. We are also targeting older people. Older people don't want to go to the disco at one o'clock in the morning and party and stay there until three o'clock. We have to have the flexibility to accommodate ballroom dancing. So,



*Captain Alessandro Galotto at the controls of Carnival Pride.*

we have been opening our vision and extending our product through all the classes. The product has changed and keeps on changing."

#### *Not Just a Ship Driver*

Captain Galotto began his description of the role of a cruise ship captain by describing the task that first comes to mind when one thinks of a cruise ship captain -- driving the ship. "In normal navigation, there are two officers on the bridge and one quartermaster. Mainly, we are on autopilot unless there is some specific condition like [we are] near the coast, approaching or leaving the port, fog or extreme weather conditions. [In those situations], we go manual and you have the quartermaster actually on the wheel driving [under the supervision of] the officer in charge."

"When I step on the bridge, then we do a hand over. We go from one status where an officer is in charge [to where] I take over and the officers assist me. That is mainly in abnormal weather conditions and when we are arriving in port. I will give the orders directly to the quartermaster [during the approach] and maneuver with my hands [when we are] parking -- docking and undocking the boat."

"At some ports, it is done with help and feedback from the pilot. For example, in Nassau I handed it over to the pilot and he gave the orders to the quartermaster and brought the ship in. I hand

over the driving - - the command is still mine, I am still responsible. The pilot acts as an advisor; he gives the orders to the quartermaster under my supervision. Then, when we were next to dock, I docked the ship."

"We have a program to teach the younger officers. [Accordingly, the staff captain] and I share the docking. I teach him. We do one week each, so we are fair. Otherwise, he would want to be doing it all the time and that takes away the fun for me because it is the fun part."

The teaching program also extends to more junior officers in the navigation department. This is to allow them "to familiarize themselves not only with going forward and aft, increasing and decreasing [the speed of the ship] which is what they do on a normal sea day, but also with maneuvering - - to see how it feels. It is one thing to watch and another thing to put your hands there and see how the ship maneuvers because it is 960 feet, a big car to park." This type of training takes place "mostly when [the ship is] in an anchorage. [The captain says:] 'its okay, you anchor' They start to feel the controls to see how long it takes, how much power you need, how long it takes to stop it, how much reverse propeller you have to give at certain speeds. It is hands on [training]. You watch, you look, you put your hands on it and then you start learning and slowly, you reach the top."

Being the captain of a modern cruise ship is not just about driving the ship. "It is like a small town with me being sort of on top of everybody but not really. We all work together. We have two major operations onboard - the hotel and the technical. If there is one and not the other the whole operation fails. If there is no technical, [the ship] does not work but if there is only technical and no hotel, we have no purpose to exist because that is what we are here for. So, everything has to work in harmony, like a gear, like a Swiss watch. It is complex but somehow it works. The hotel is the hotel director. Technical is me and the chief engineer. We work together."

"We are a family but like in a family there are [disputes] sometimes. As long as you bring them up, you solve them. Communication is important. That is what I stress. I stress: you have to communicate. If you are in doubt, pick up the



phone and give them a call. We unfortunately tend to delegate [too much to] the computer, the e-mails. If it must be so important that you have to have something in writing [an e-mail is appropriate]. But for immediate action, just pick up the phone. Also, because we are a multi-national society [onboard], what you express in an e-mail, might not be interpreted in the right way. So, it is better to pick up the phone."

"You try and [create a relaxed atmosphere]. Tension does not work. If you have a challenge, you have to keep everybody calm and move them to their corners. Sometimes, I work as a politician as well. If somebody has [an issue] and then I go and talk to this person and then I go and talk to the other person. It's more like a mediator in effect."

The captain of a cruise ship is always an officer who has risen to that position through the navigation department. Yet, in order to command the overall operation effectively and to work with the various department heads, he must learn the issues that confront the hotel department and the engineering department. "It is a very hands on job. You learn as you work. It is experience that makes it. As a cadet, your interest has to be wide. It is not like you are doing one set of papers, you have to look at the whole desk. You can't only drive the ship. For example, nobody ever told me how to be interviewed or how to entertain guests. Also, the hotel director and the guest services manager have issues and they deal with them but sometimes [I have to get involved] These things you don't learn at school. The chief engineer is there to help you and explain [the technical questions] to you. He is

the expert. Over the years, you learn."

### *Pride Comes to Baltimore*

In late April 2009, Carnival Pride became the first modern cruise ship to be based in Baltimore, Maryland year round. By so doing Carnival brought cruising within easy driving distance of millions of residents of the mid-Atlantic region. However, Baltimore is located relatively far inland up the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, it can be quite cold in Maryland in the winter and there is the possibility of winter storms once a ship gets out to sea.

"Baltimore cruises are a bit challenging for us. Of course, we will overcome the challenges. This is the first time that Carnival has offered year round - - [including] in the winter - - cruises from the north. That is a challenge."

Norwegian Cruise Line and Royal Caribbean have been providing cruises year round from New York for several years and New York is further north than Baltimore. However, Carnival elected not to follow its competitors lead with regard to homeports. "New York is far away [from the warm weather islands]. That is why they went for Baltimore because it is closer."

"In Baltimore, we have a nine-hour passage through the Chesapeake." While this is grueling for the navigation officers who must stay on the bridge throughout, it also means that the ship is in relatively sheltered waters for part of its way south. While calm waters make for a comfortable ride, they also lend themselves to fog. "We had a little bit of fog on the way out [on the second cruise from Baltimore]. With today's technology we can navigate safely in fog."

"It is basically a north/south course - - we go from Baltimore straight down to the Bahamas. So, in hurricane season, we'll have a back-up plan. Basically, we will have to go north to St Johns, Halifax and New York, maybe, and other ports [if there is a hurricane to the south]. Other than that in the summer, I don't foresee any other problems."

"The people, the guests from Baltimore, so far have been very good. Like any other company we have a rating system and the guests rate us on the [cruise] experience. We had very good ratings, very high ratings on the first cruise. The guests seem to be a little more subdued than on the West Coast. You go on the Lido in the West Coast and [there is] noise and people. Here, it is quiet. "

Carnival Pride was selected to be the Carnival ship sailing out of Baltimore for several reasons. Although initially homeported in Port Canaveral, Florida, Pride has for the last several years been sailing seven day cruises from Los Angeles to Mexico. "Pride had to leave the West Coast. The Californian crowd gets tired, gets bored, because the ports are the same. So what do you do? You can't change the ports so you change the ship. Every five or six years, Carnival has been changing the ships, bringing in a new product. Now, the Carnival Splendor, which is the newest ship [in the Carnival fleet] is there doing [seven-day] cruises, so we had to go, we had to re-locate. There is no market for two seven-day ships. We have other three and four-day ships [operating on the West Coast] but that is another sector of the market. Seven days, one ship is plenty. Also, the Splendor is a bigger ship with larger capacity."

Meanwhile, Carnival was considering expanding its service to Baltimore, a market with a large number of potential cruisers but also one where the general population has not had much exposure to cruising. Pride is one of four Spirit class ships in the Carnival fleet. At 88,500 gross tons, these ships are large but not as large as Carnival's Conquest class megacruise ships. However, their hulls are the same as the Vista class ships used by Holland America and Cunard for cruising in colder climates. "The Pride, from my personal point of view and also talking to some of the other captains too, is the right size and capacity for this market. Her seaworthiness is superior to other classes. I have been on two of the Conquest class ships and they are beautiful ships. But if I had to compare them, if I had to make a decision, I would send a Spirit class on this kind of run. Pride is fairly new - - she came out in December 2001 - - so she is not even eight years old. Technically speaking, I think she is the right choice. It is a nice ship."