

# AN INTERVIEW WITH CAPTAIN FRANCESCO LA FAUCI

A conversation with the master of Carnival Triumph

by

Richard H. Wagner

Captain Francesco La Fauci is from a seagoing Sicilian family. Both his father and his grandfather were fishermen. However, after attending the maritime academy at Messina, Captain La Fauci went to sea on tankers. Then in 1983, he left the oil giant Chevron and went to work for a small cruise line operating out of Miami called Carnival Cruise Lines. "When I came here there were only four ships."

Today, there are 22 Carnival ships and as one of Carnival's longest serving captains, Captain La Fauci has seen the line not only grow but evolve from party boats to family vacation palaces. "They are not the Fun Ships they used to be with lots of young [people]. Now, it is more orientated to families and middle-aged guests. This run out of New York is all middle-aged people. You don't have any younger cruisers onboard. In the Caribbean, there are lots of families in the summertime. Before, it used to be a lot of groups of young people, having a good time, let's say," he says with a smile.

For the last several years, Captain La Fauci has been in command of the legendary Carnival

Triumph, a 101,000 gross ton giant. Triumph is a Destiny-class ship, a design that has been used extensively by both Carnival Cruise Lines and sister company Costa Cruises. In fact, some of the most recent Costa and Carnival ships (e.g. Costa Concordia and Carnival Splendor) are evolutions of the Destiny design. "Destiny was the first one in 1996. - - I took the Destiny out as Staff Captain. In 1996, it was the biggest ship in the world, built in Malfalco in Italy. After that, there was the Triumph in 1999 and the Victory was in 2000. Triumph was the second Destiny class."

"The ship has been in service for almost ten years and is well up-to-date in her bridge instruments. Keep in mind that every three years, this ship is in dry dock. We spend money every three years when the ship was in drydock for major refurbishment. You have to upgrade a ship like it was your own house - - every few years you spend money. We were in drydock in September and we invested millions of dollars for a full bridge update on the vessel - - new radars, new echo sounder and so on."

"A ship of this size and quality can last 30



years as long as you spend money. It all has to do with investing. If every three years you keep spending money, the ship can last 30 years, even a modern vessel. Ships of the past went on 30, 40 years, look at the Queen Elizabeth 2".

One factor that can limit the life of a ship is the implementation of new more stringent safety regulations. "The reason why the older ships of the past - - the Rotterdam, the Nieu Amsterdam, those beautiful liners - - went out of service was because they [could not] meet the new safety regulations. To upgrade the ship would have cost them millions and millions of dollars and it was not worth it. It was cheaper to buy new ships. So, most of the time, [the limiting factor] is implementation of new rules and regulations, which cost millions of dollars. As long as every three years you spend money as we do, the ship can go on." Thus, Triumph will have no problem meeting the new international Safety Of Life At Sea (SOLAS) regulations that will be implemented in 2010.

In addition to upgrading the marine technology, a cruise ship's amenities must be upgraded periodically so that the ship remains attractive to the cruising public. Accordingly, a giant outdoor LCD movie screen was recently added to Triumph overlooking her main swimming pool area. "The movie screen, which was very expensive, was installed this past drydock in September - - lots of work. The workers came from Italy to create this big frame. I can't remember how many tons of steel there were welded by professional welders - - special steel and professional welders built the actual frame for the screen. Then, they mounted the electronics behind it. The screen is very popular."

Of course, before a new feature is added, the cruise line must take into account how it will affect the seakeeping abilities of the ship. In this instance, it was determined that the additional weight would not affect the ship's stability. However, based upon experience with Carnival Victory, which had a similar screen added to her earlier, "sometimes at night when there is poor visibility, the reflection of the screen [might affect the vision of the officers driving the ship on the bridge]. So, we may need at certain times to switch it off because the reflection of the screen may affect the navigation. Otherwise, there will be no problem at all."

The Destiny class ships such as Triumph "handle the sea pretty good. The Sprit class [i.e., Carnival Spirit, Carnival Pride, Carnival Legend and Carnival Miracle], are longer, lower sail, let's



*Captain Francesco La Fauci on the bridge of Carnival Triumph.*

say more marine. So, in bad weather they probably handle the sea better than this class of vessel."

Still, as noted earlier, the Destiny class design has been tremendously successful and remains the basis for new ships. "We carry more guests than the Sprit class, so [we are] more cost efficient. There is more revenue on this class of vessel because you have more passengers."

In addition, Triumph and her sisters are very maneuverable, which is a necessity when calling on islands where tug boats are not always available and very useful in ports like New York where the currents around the piers can be very tricky. Captain La Fauci attributes Triumph's maneuverability primarily to the fact that Triumph has "variable pitch propellers. A variable pitch propeller is very good for maneuvering. The response is fast. It is not as good as the Spirit [class, which have azipod propulsion where the propellers are mounted on pods suspended below the hull that can turn 360 degrees]. I have done the azipod [system] as well. Azipods are the best for maneuvering. For reliabil-





ity, I don't know because azipod is a very delicate system. If it works, it is perfect. But, the variable pitch propeller has more reliability. In fact, we [i.e. Carnival Cruise Lines] are not building any more azipod ships."

In recent years, Triumph has been based in Miami doing Caribbean cruises. However, in 2009, she did a series of re-positioning cruises up the East Coast including cruises out of Charleston, South Carolina and Norfolk Virginia before arriving in New York for the summer and early fall. The New York runs are primarily short four and five day cruises which can be taxing on a crew. However, "the crew loves this run. I am the first one who likes this run. I like Nova Scotia, I like New England, the good temperature. It is nice to walk out in St. John, you have a shopping mall, a shopping area, a Canadian atmosphere - - different shops, different culture, different buildings - - all within walking distance. Halifax has a beautiful waterfront, a beautiful sailing vessel of the past, a nice museum, very pretty - - all within walking distance. The crew can go

shopping in Halifax and St. John. They all get out in New York. They go to Broadway, they go to Central Park, they all hang around New York. The crew loves New York. The crew morale is bursting, mainly because of New York but they like Canada as well."

*Below: The bridge of Carnival Triumph.*

