

INSIDE INTERVIEW:

AT THE HELM OF CELEBRITY CONSTELLATION

A conversation with Captain Gerry Larsson-Fedde.

by

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Captain Gerry Larsson-Fedde prefers to be called 'Captain Gerry.' "To me, it comes more natural. I try and be more personal and using your first name makes it more personal."

Indeed, it reflects with his style of command. "We need to work together. It is not who is in charge of this. We are all in charge of making sure the guests have a good time. More cooperation and the less authoritarian style of management, I think works best."

Captain Gerry started to develop his style of command in his native Norway. A fifth generation sea captain, Captain Gerry graduated from the Norwegian Naval Academy and then commanded ships in the Norwegian Navy. In civilian life, he first worked as a marine pilot in Norway before joining Royal Caribbean International. Following a period working shoreside in Norway, he joined Celebrity Cruises.

"I am the first non-Greek to be a captain with Celebrity Cruises. The company used to be part of Chandris and Chandris was a Greek ship owner. When

Royal Caribbean Cruises Limited purchased Celebrity 20 years ago, they had an agreement that entitled the Greek officers to continue to work on the ships. Then as we moved on and we now have the Maltese flag on the ships, it opened up for more of an international crewing."

"I was fortunate because when I worked for Royal, one of the years that I worked in the corporate office, I was fleet captain for Royal. I had a lot to do with the fleet captain for Celebrity. I actually did navigation audits on all of the Celebrity ships, so I knew quite a few of the people onboard and about the company before I joined."

"Working, whether they are Greek or Norwegian, it doesn't really matter that much. They are all qualified sailors and officers. One thing I have found here is that the Greek officers are very, very skilled, very, very capable. Norwegians and Greeks, we have a long maritime tradition and so I think we work well together."

In addition to being the first non-Greek captain, Captain Gerry is the first Celebrity captain to have also commanded ships for Royal Caribbean International including Voyager of the Seas, Vision of the Seas and Grandeur of the Seas. Although RCI and Celebrity are both owned by Royal Caribbean Cruises Limited, marine officers from one line do not normally serve on ships of the other line.

"The only reason [I was allowed to crossover] was that I was outside the company for two years working in a hydrographic office in Norway as a managing director. You have to be out; you can't swap from one to the other. But if you go out, you can be hired in again. It is not like you can do one contract on the Constellation and the next on the Voyager - maybe in the future, but not now."

This separation flows from the fact that although the two lines have a common ownership, each line endeavors to provide a different style of cruise experience. Having commanded ships for both RCI and Celebrity, Captain Gerry is in a unique position to explain the difference between the two lines.

"We have two market segments that we are approaching. With Royal, it is more of an adventure type of cruise. They have all of these innovative things on the ships that appeal to families - ice skating, rock climbing."

"The Allure and the Oasis are fantastic ships and they are good for us as a company because those ships are fully booked, very popular and they get a lot of attention in the media, which is good for all our brands."

"If you are a family with 12 or 13 year old kids, you probably want to go on one of the big Royal ships."

"I think we are more like cool-elegant. It is still contemporary but we still keep an elegant aspect to it. We have more crew per passenger, the service level is higher, the food quality is higher. [Although elegant], it doesn't become too stiff. It is somewhere in between, which I like."

"I remember the first time I went on the Eclipse - I was lucky enough to be there for the conveyance and the sea trials. That was the first time that I was on a Solstice class ship and I was blown away - the design of the interior, the contemporary look. It just looks very, very elegant. At the same time, for someone my age



Captain Gerry Larsson-Fedde on the bridge of Celebrity Constellation.

(I'm 44) you still want to have a good time and you have that chance - you have a very cool martini bar; you have all these things. I think that combination is really nice."

"If you are my age - and even if you have smaller kids because you have the [children's] club here - and you want to go and enjoy yourselves then these ships are phenomenal."

Captain Gerry is also in a position to compare the ships of the two lines from a mariner's perspective. For example, comparing Celebrity's Millennium class ships to Royal's Voyager class, he said: "They both have azipod propulsion systems so the maneuvering part is very similar. Being that the Voyager is about 50,000 tons heavier, I found that these ships [i.e., the Millennium class] are a little more responsive meaning when you have winds, they respond to the wind quick-

er. The same when you use your engine and your thrusters, they are more responsive. On the bigger ships you would find that it takes longer to get going but when she gets going, you need to be careful because she is harder to stop. So there is a bit of a difference."

"The Voyager had more power so even though the ship was bigger, she could sustain more side winds [and thus do] more maneuvering without tugs than we can do here. This one can handle up to about 30 knots of wind without a tug."

"From an operational point of view as mariners, there are not huge differences. The good thing for me when I joined Celebrity after having been with Royal is that we have the same policies - - how we run operations is the same for both brands. For navigation are policies are the exact same."

Solsticizing The Connie

One of the biggest challenges that Captain Gerry has faced since coming to Celebrity was the Solsticizing of Celebrity Constellation. Solsticizing is the process of taking popular features from Celebrity's Solstice class ships and incorporating them into Celebrity's Millennium class ships.

"I took the ship over transatlantic to the shipyard. I was onboard for the 12 days that we did at Volm and Voss in Hamburg, Germany for the Solsticizing, which was a very fascinating experience. To see all the work that we were able to do in 12 days was unbelievable."

"We had a full cruise going over from Miami. As soon as all the guests disembarked in Hamburg, we loaded quite a few things and then we went to the drydock. We had about 600 contractors come aboard. Most of the crew stayed onboard and additional crew came."

"We re-did all of the staterooms with new carpets, new upholstery and flat screen TVs. In order to get all of them done within the days we had, we had to do 99 cabins per day, which is quite a tremendous amount of work."

"In addition, all of the ship's carpet had to be changed in the stairways, landings and [public areas]. We changed [the Cova Café into] Café al Bacio. We built the Gelateria. We had the Tuscan Grille built with a galley and everything, which was quite a large job. The same with the Bistro on Five, which needed a galley as well. We plugged the 'hole' beneath the Champagne Bar and the old Martini Bar. We installed the [new] Martini Bar and the Ice Bar."

"We also did what you normally do in drydock such as the painting of the underwater hull. We changed the bearings on the azipods, which was quite a large job.

We did cleaning and routines on the thrusters."

"We have a few new items on the bridge. [Going into effect in 2014], there is a requirement that all ships carry electronic charts and electronic chart display systems. We already had that in all our ships. But if you want to then move away from using paper charts you need an additional unit and we had that installed when we were in drydock. We also had some systems installed that are helping us improve our fuel consumption."

"All of this was going on at the same time. You have to cover everything because, for example, you do not want to put in new carpet and have someone walk over it with paint on their shoes. We had plastic everywhere and plywood. It is an amazing process."

Planning was crucial. For example, the right cranes had to be available at the right time to lift containers on and off the ship. Arrangements had to be made for the removal and recycling of old carpeting and other garbage.

An unforeseen complication arose when a volcano in Iceland released a huge ash cloud grounding transatlantic flights and most flights in Europe. "We had a lot of things that were being flown in. So we had to re-organize and put things on ships in time to get them there on time. Other things we had to get from somewhere else than where we expected to get them from. There were huge challenges from that on top of everything else."

"From an operational point of view a main focus was the fire hazards. There was a lot of welding and hot work going on. So we had to have a very big team. We had briefings every day on safety. We were able to go through the entire period without any fires."

"It was a very busy period of time. Three days before we were to be in Amsterdam to pick up the guests for our first cruise after the Solsticizing, I walked around and thought 'I don't think we are going to be ready.' It is always kind of stressful when you know that you have 2,000 guests waiting for you. They expect to get the same Celebrity service that they got before. They do not expect to get a ship that is half done."

"And it was amazing - - we said 'now we need to get ready' and everything fell into place. We did not open the Tuscan Grille and the Bristro on Five until three days into the cruise but that was as planned. Apart from that, everything was ready and worked well."

Aside from the challenge of doing all the planned work in the allotted time, there was another challenge. As Captain Gerry noted, Constellation is "the most renown Millennium class ship. We have a lot

of followers who have been on this ship." Thus, not only did the work have to be done on time, it had to be done in a way that would preserve the qualities that had made the ship popular.

"I think it was a gamble that worked out. The feedback that I have been getting from the frequent cruisers is that they are pleased with the changes that have been done. The Connie is still the Connie. She has just been given a facelift; given a new youth. It still has the atmosphere that it had before."

"The transformation, in my opinion, was needed and it has been shown to be working very well. It is like a new ship in many ways. That is the feedback that we are getting from most of our guests as well."

"Not only did we change the venues and put in new carpet, we also went over in the hotel department to the uniforms that they have on the Solstice-class, which I think are very elegant. One thing with the crew is that when their uniforms are nice and elegant you can see that they feel proud about it as well. It reflects not only in how they look but how they behave. So I think the whole thing combined was a very nice thing. It turned out really well."

The Human Factor

For Captain Gerry, building interesting features into a ship and creating a beautiful décor is only the first step in ensuring that the guests have a good cruise experience. Key to a memorable cruise is "what you experience when you come onboard - - how you are greeted, how you are treated by the crew, how the service is, the quality of the food. For those who come on these cruises, that is what they are looking for."

"That is something that a captain [and the ship's] management are able to do something about. The ships

have been built. I cannot re-build the ships but I can do quite a lot for the atmosphere on the ship."

Vital to creating the right atmosphere is how management treats the crew. "If I have a crew member who signs off here and goes on vacation, I want him or her to want to come back to the Constellation - - 'I liked being on the Constellation, I was treated well on the Constellation. We work hard but we like to do it and we get acknowledgement for doing a good job. We like being here.'"

"That all reflects on how they treat the guests as well. When they are smiling, it is a real smile because they are happy to be here. You see a difference between that and the smile that is on there because they have been told to smile. That is our philosophy; that is what works."

"I always remember when I was going through the ranks and the captain would come over to me and say 'Gerry, you did a good job today.' I would live on that for 14 days. It is important when we are get to [a senior] role that we do not forget that. So I try to tell myself everyday, remember when you pass a stateroom attendant give him a pat on the back and say good job because it means a lot to them when someone actually tells them that they are actually are doing a good job. And that is what I think is going to keep this ship and this company at the level where we are."

"I see that in the comments we get back from the guests. It is amazing how many of the guests are focused on how we treat our crew. They like to see that we treat them well and we take care of them. I think that makes the guests' experience better as well."

