





Taking risks to stay safe

Forget disasters and surprise events. The safety side of simulator training is all about testing the limits. So says veteran mariner Captain Dan Wikingsson. He spoke to *Generations* at Aboa Mare Simulation Center in Finland.

“It’s a waste of time trying to get people to run aground on a simulator. That’s just not educational,” says former Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) captain, and current Managing Director of Salen Ship Management, Dan Wikingsson.

“It’s about assessing situations and building confidence. On a simulator you can try out things you wouldn’t normally do. It’s much safer to do that with an instructor than out there at a port.”

He should know. With over 30 years’ experience as a captain of both cargo and cruise vessels, Wikingsson has clocked up his fair share of hours on simulators around the world.

“Simulator training is so vital that you wonder how on earth people used to manage without it. With the



Captain Dan Wikingsson

- Managing Director of Gothenberg-based Salen Ship Management
- Captain on cargo and cruise vessels for over 30 years
- Worked for Star Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL)
- Helped build NCL's largest cruise ship Norwegian Epic at STX Europe's Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard in Saint-Nazaire, France
- Part of site team that built the Superstar Leo, Superstar Virgo and Norwegian Star for Star Cruises at Meyer Werft's Papenburg shipyard in Germany

simulator, the possibilities are so wide. For the sake of safety, you have to understand those possibilities and know what the borders are.

"In real life you can't push those borders because it's too risky, but on the simulator you might find a way to maneuver more safely or even more fuel efficiently," says Wikingsson.

When he worked for NCL, simulator training was standard practice if a ship changed itinerary. Navigators would be sent to a training center in Miami to practice moving in and out of new or challenging ports.

"When you're approaching a port with 2,700 passengers on board and about 1,700 people at the port, it's vital to know the limits. If, for some reason – be it wind, weather, the environment or current – you judge that you can't enter a port without huge risk to lives, then you might have to wait six or seven hours for a tugboat.

"Those are the tricky decisions for a captain. If you have been on a simulator, you will have realized you



can do it at this wind speed but not beyond. That gives you the confidence to say: 'Sorry, we can't do this'."

Azipod® simulator training

Wikingsson's career included three years at Meyer Werft's Papenburg shipyard in Germany. As staff captain for Star Cruises, he was part of the newbuilding site team that delivered vessels in the late-1990s and early-2000s. During this time, he helped build the cruise ships Superstar Virgo, Superstar Leo and Norwegian Star.

"A week's Azipod® simulator training at the Danish Maritime Institute (DMI) in Copenhagen was included with each delivery from ABB. The training had two aims: familiarization with Azipod® maneuvering and with ports," says Wikingsson.

"The DMI took our itinerary, went to all the ports we would go to with the new ship and digitized them. Those are the most relevant courses I've done on a simulator," says Wikingsson.

"The reason why simulator training was started for Azipods was because when people started running these ships, they didn't do it properly. It's like jumping from a bicycle to a unicycle. You have to unlearn and relearn a lot of stuff. Like any advanced tool, it takes time to learn and practice," he says.

As for the quality of simulator training, he says: "It depends on who is running it, its technical capabilities and how accurate the computer model of the ship is. "If the simulator leader tells you to enter a port with, say, 12 meters of wind force from a certain direction, you need to have an accurate numeric model of the ship and the force. That's how you get a grip on the limits of what you can do."

Text: Helen Karlsen