

MARK MCGORRIN

Share a day in the life of the chief mate on the Kirkella

FISHING NEWS CAUGHT up with Mark McGorrin, chief mate on UK Fisheries' last distant-water trawler Kirkella, when the vessel was fishing southeast of Edgeøya Island, in the Barents Sea.

"This trip has been going very, very well. We've had two inspections from the Coastguard, both of which went very well. The catch has also been very good – mainly cod," he said.

When on a trip, the state-of-the-art Kirkella, built in 2018, becomes Mark's home for between eight and 10 weeks. "I was on the old Kirkella, which is now the Lodairo, for approximately three years before we got the new vessel. It's a really, really good boat, this is."

Being a distant-water vessel, crew comfort is at the heart of its design. "Everything is there for the crew to enjoy their time off. They can watch movies, have a sauna, go to the gym, or have a jacuzzi.

"This trip there are 26 of us, the next trip will be 28. We sailed a couple of men short

By PAUL SCOTT

this time, but for the next trip we're taking on some new, young guys. There's quite a lot for their comfort – and the guys respect everything, they treat it all like they do their own gear."

The modern comforts are a far cry from Mark's introduction to the industry. "I started off in a fish yard when I was 16. I was there for a year before I started fishing. I began on the Pauline Anne – it was a half-share, and in three months I think I made about £35.

"I was actually going to go back to work in the fish yard, but then got a job on a vessel called the Aquila PD 220 with skipper Willian Strachan from Peterhead.

"He took me on and showed me the ropes, and then a friend of mine took over the skipper's job, a gentleman called Ernest Ritchie – who's still a friend of mine – a really, really nice guy. I progressed from there, and in 1996 I got my Class Two ticket."

After a spell with the distant-water trawler Norma Mary, Mark returned to shorter

trips following the death of his father Thomas in 2003.

"I was working in Immingham on a beam trawler to stay alongside and be near to my mother. I came home one day, and my mother said I needed to call the office in Aberdeen. I called, and they said: 'The captain would like you as second mate onboard the Arctic Warrior.' So I asked my mother, and she said: 'If you don't go, I'll be mad at you!'."

In 2008, Mark passed his Class One ticket. "I was trained up by the captain who's on the bridge right now, Sigurbjorn Sigurdsson. He showed me how to haul, how to shoot – many different things. Eventually, I was offered the full-time mate's job, and just took it from there."

NOW CHIEF MATE ON the Kirkella, Mark's role encompasses a wide range of tasks, both on the bridge and on deck – as well as looking after the safety of those onboard.

"My job is to ensure the safety of the vessel, and to induct new crew members into our safety system. They get a tour of the vessel and a full induction. I'm also responsible for the safety drills on the vessel.

"We have drills steaming off, drills steaming home – and



if we've got time in between the fishing, we'll call the drills again.

"I also make sure all the crew are up to specification with their safety certifications – so there's quite a lot to the role."

Another part of Mark's job is to be on watch, alternating with the captain. "On a fishing watch, the captain will spend 12 hours, and I'll spend 12 hours, hauling and shooting. I also take care of the logbooks and reporting for the E-Catch system."

Mark's watch begins at 6pm. "I usually wake up at about 5.15pm – and head up to the bridge at around 5.40pm.

"I'll do the handover with the captain, check my logbook to make sure the numbers are running exactly, and then move

▲ Peterhead-born Mark McGorrin (right), chief mate on the Kirkella, pictured with Johnny Buchan on a previous trip. The 81m Kirkella has capacity for 30 crew, and was designed with comfort and wellbeing in mind. "One thing we don't have is a high turnover of crew. Our guys stick with us for quite a long time. We've got guys here who were with us on the Arctic Warrior, and they've stuck with us since then. I've got two or three guys I've been with since 2004."

on to any emails. On handover, I always say: 'I've got command' – so on the VDR it's been recorded that I've stated that I'm in control."

The Kirkella catches around 10t to 12t per haul, and once brought onboard it is processed by the crew, with the first fish reaching the vessel's onboard freezer just 40 minutes after being hauled. Meanwhile, the gear is cleaned before being shot for the next tow.

If a catch hasn't been processed before midnight, Mark will estimate the figure for the E-Catch system, with a correction submitted once the true number becomes available.

"When the captain comes in at 6am, I'll tell him everything that's happened, whether I've put a correction in for the E-Catch, what we've caught, or if we've changed wires – anything that he needs to know."

With Mark's day – or night – complete, it's time for him to enjoy some of the Kirkella's home-from-home comforts.

"I'll depart the bridge and might go to the factory or on deck to do some jobs. After that, I might go to the sauna for an hour – where I'll probably fall asleep!"



▲ As well as bridge and deck duties, Mark's role sees him induct new crew onto the vessel. "The Kirkella has a reputation for taking young guys and training them up. It doesn't matter where they're from in the UK, if they've gone through the colleges as trainee fishermen, and we require people, then we'll take them on and train them up to be a deckhand."



▲ Mark and the crew on the Kirkella take images and videos for use on the vessel's Twitter, Facebook and Instagram channels (@GreatBritFish). "If you see the scenery in Norway, it's spectacular. People pay a fortune to go on cruise ships – but we get to see it all. The start of last year we were in the ice – and it was spectacular. Towing in the ice, it was just beautiful, spectacular. It's unbelievable. There are no other words for it."