Pete Thornton has always had a passion for sailing and the sea. His career extends from the Gorran and Mevagissey Sea Scouts in Cornwall, to being awarded an MBE at the age of only twenty-five for a period of service as the Flag Lieutenant to the First Sea Lord and Admiralty Board at the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Pete also enjoys competitive racing, where he participated in the latest Clipper 2015-16 Race (Roles Sydney-Hobart Leg 4), helping take the GREAT Britain Team to the podium in this challenging endurance event. More recently, he has just started a new role as Relief Captain on the super yacht “Sea Eagle”, which will involve sailing around Europe and the Caribbean.

What made you take up the Clipper Race Challenge?
The desire to be employed to race across oceans and build a team to do so.

How did you prepare for this event?
Prior to believing I was capable enough to accept the task, I took every opportunity around my RFA and large yacht career to continue sailing and racing yachts. I enjoyed learning from some very experienced sailors around the world (I still do!) as well as developing those skills as Skipper and Instructor by teaching when I had the chance. I had just started a new role as Relief Captain on the super yacht “Sea Eagle”, which will involve sailing around Europe and the Caribbean.

What’s your favourite ship?
I truly believe there is nothing else in the world quite like this race. It’s difficult to name one most challenging moment. There are many situations that were tough due to extreme weather - be it dead calm in stifling heat where you may get stuck and painstakingly watch your competitors sail away or worrying about the balance between racing the boat too hard versus safety in all conditions, day and night with crew on deck 24/7. Then there were the freezing relentless storms force mid ocean battles with non-professional crew looking cold, tired and frightened. It’s the whole package that’s the challenge, but that is the reason we do it. There is a huge sense of satisfaction and relief at the end.

What has been the media impact of such an achievement?
I truly believe there is nothing else in the world quite like this race. For me personally, large - in the sense of being part of a documentary aired on Sky Sports, and being interviewed in each port and on the boat by various newspapers, magazines and TV/radio stations, who are all very interested in the challenge we are taking on. It was a great, fun part of the job and an element I enjoy doing as I truly believe there is nothing else in the world quite like this race for people from all walks of life to achieve something they thought unlikely.

What’s your next challenge?
Good question. I’ve taken a bit of time to relax and I’m now open to my options.

What has been your most memorable shipping experience?
Before the race it was seeing my first iceberg! With binoculars on a cold, open door bridge at around 11:00 PM under a partially moonlit sky just north of South Georgia and I as a first trip OOW on RFA Diligence was delighted to see the first one of the voyage.

Now, (although this is not strictly shipping as such) it is probably getting picked up by a huge set of waves in the dead of night in the North Pacific. We had been blasting downwind for nearly two weeks in averages of F8-9 and taking front after squarely front of cold guilty F10-12 winds with corresponding seas. The winds had eased but the seas were big - a dangerous situation when racing. We were with two reefs and one small headsail, I’d come up and taken the wheel as you could feel things were changing. Before long, in the dark, one particular wave picked us up, not unlike many others but then it kept going.