

JOHN ROBERTSON : THE SOUTH AFRICAN LEOPARD!

His name could be straight of a quiz show trick question: John Robertson from Robertson & Caine. He must be American! Wrong. He and his partner have given their names to the second biggest catamaran manufacturer in the world. And that's another red herring. In fact he is not a European but South African! In your defense, you could say that none of the 1,300 boats that he has produced have his name on them. Which is more than reason enough to meet this major player in the small world of catamarans.

Interviewed by
François Tréguët

Right from the off, there's no doubt that we're dealing with the right person. Despite the fact that his shipyards can be found all around across the globe, and that he has lived in the US since 2000, he is South African through and through. The broad accent with which he speaks English is instantly recognizable. Looking at his imposing stature, he could have been a serious rugby player too. His commanding stature makes one think of the Moai, those huge statues which litter Easter Island, and which were the inspiration for the interiors of the Leopard range of boats. The boats are moored at the Miami Boat Show, which is where we meet up.

We try and find a quiet spot away from the crowds that are milling around the huge Strictly Sail Leopard tent here in Miami. Several owners come to greet John, and he always asks for their feedback on the boats. John also doesn't miss out on visiting other boats either. Never underestimating the competition, he wanders up and down the docks looking for that idea, that detail or that new innovation that he might have missed out on. We find a quiet spot high up. From there we can appreciate the hugeness of the flybridge salon of the Leopard 58 and we settle down. A real luxury in the middle of a Boat Show. Today is Robertson & Caine's 25th birthday! John tells me that the company registration documents are dated the 14th February 1991. That's one Valentine's Day that won't be forgotten. And it seems to have brought luck to the South African shipyard.

However, as is often the case in business, luck has had little to do with his success. Just because their first shipyard was based in an area of Cape Town known as Woodstock doesn't mean that its' owners were beatniks. They were

