

By Tackline

# HANDY HAMMOND

LET me introduce you to one of the true "characters" of the Durban Yacht Basin. That is, if you do not already know him, for he is known to many — and, I'll wager, knows far more people than they do him.

His name is Hammond — Hammond Basha, to be exact. But he has been known to thousands of boating friends over the years simply as Hammond.

He's an African, 52 years old, born in Umtata of the Xhosa tribe. He came to Durban in 1942 and started work as a handyman in Fred Nicoll's boatyard. But in next to no time, this son of the Transkei soon found himself afloat, and has been a jovial personality on the ferry service ever since.

Tell him the name of a boat, and he'll tell you all you want to know about it. Mention the name of a boat owner, and he'll tell you all you want to know about him, too — with discretion of course!

Ask him about the early days of the ferry service, and he'll smile wryly and tell you how he had to row his clients to and from boats at the moorings so that people could have their fun. And that was no joke at all in the days before the yacht mole was built and when one of Durban's seemingly ever-present south-westers was blowing.

Nowadays, like everything else, Hammond is mechanis-

ed. In fact, since shortly after the war, the yellow ferry boats he and his five other Africans (he's in charge) operate round the clock have been powered by specially mounted outboard motors. And if you want to see a work of art, just watch those chaps as they manoeuvre their boats into seemingly impossible places without touching another craft.

Yes, Hammond and his team certainly know what they are doing when they are at the controls. And they have to, for they have to qualify for a ferryman's licence for the area in which they work before they can be employed on carrying their cargoes of human lives.

And taking people to their boats is not their only task. These men are always on the lookout for things going wrong in the Yacht Basin. If a boat pulls its moorings, for example, off they go to put it right. Often this can mean reconnecting a line to a block on the sea bottom.

"Yes," Hammond told me, "I am a good diver, too. I go down and fix things good."

Jimmy Whittle, whose company runs the ferry service, was full of praise for what Hammond can do beneath the waves.

"If you want anything done on the bottom, or fetched from down below, just ask him — and he's off before you know what's happened," he told me.

"But I must admit he's put the wind up me on many occasions. Often have I seen

him go down and all you can see beneath the surface is the soles of his feet. Slowly the seconds tick by until you begin to wonder whether his head is stuck in the mud or something else evil has befallen him. Then just as you're about to go in after him to pull him out, up he pops, laughing all over his face and tells you the job is done."

And if you want to see an example of good rope splicing, then you should see what Hammond turns out. It's perfect. "I like to see my rope strong — and neat," he says.

But Hammond and his fellow ferrymen cannot be fooled. They are as sharp as needles. Not only do they know where every boat at the moorings is located, they also know just who is entitled to go to it. So don't try to pull any fast ones — they will soon put you in your place.

At the same time, they never hesitate to go to the aid of any boat in trouble, whether the owner is entitled to the ferry service (it is paid for on a monthly basis) or not. Many a time have they been seen pulling in a capsized yacht or a broken down motor boat.

To help others is their watchword. And many is the boating man who has had them to thank for saving their boats — and a lot of money — when things have gone wrong.

Hammond and his team are not just the salt of the earth — they are the salt of the sea as well.



Hammond — he knows all about the boats in Durban's yacht basin.