



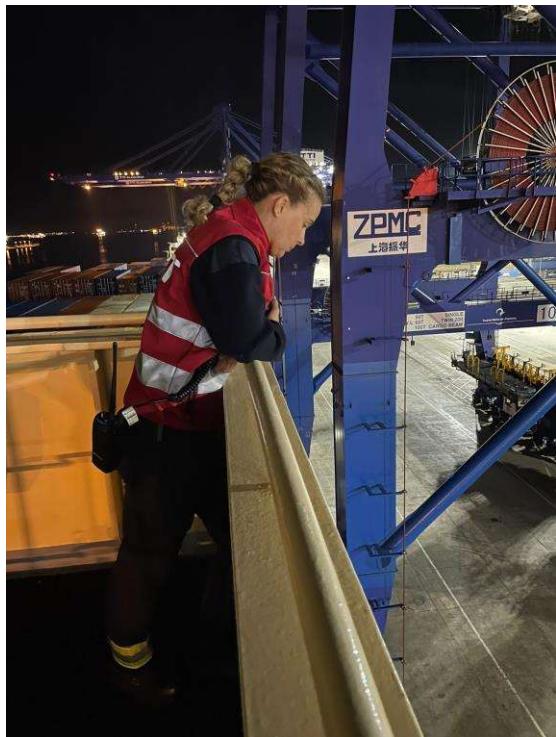
EMPA

**Maria
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Acebal**

Algeciras Pilot

I was born and grew up in Gijón, a coastal city in northern Spain. My parents' house was opposite the beach, and every day, I could see vessels coming in and out of the harbour.

No one in my family had ever been connected with the sea. Nevertheless, I have always been attracted by the maritime industry and the sea. From a very young age, I used to say I wanted to work at sea, which was very surprising at home.



I started at the University of Nautical Science in Gijón when I finished high school. My mother wanted me to study nursing; however, she still agreed that I should study nautical science. During that time, I learnt to sail and enjoyed the regattas I went to. This brought me even closer to the sea. Nowadays, I still keep up my hobby; I love sailing.

At the university, I never felt like I was in the minority because, at that time, quite a few women were studying. Although, in the end, only a few of us went on to pursue our careers at sea.

My first embark as a cadet was on a RORO ship, and that's when I decided that I definitely wanted to go sailing. Although I was a blank book, I learnt a lot and absorbed everything like a sponge. My next trip as a cadet was on tankers, and it was on this kind of ship that I spent my entire professional career, from cadet to Captain.

In the Company where I worked, I worked with several women and was rarely the only one on board. I remember one ship I served on where the First, Second, and Third Officers

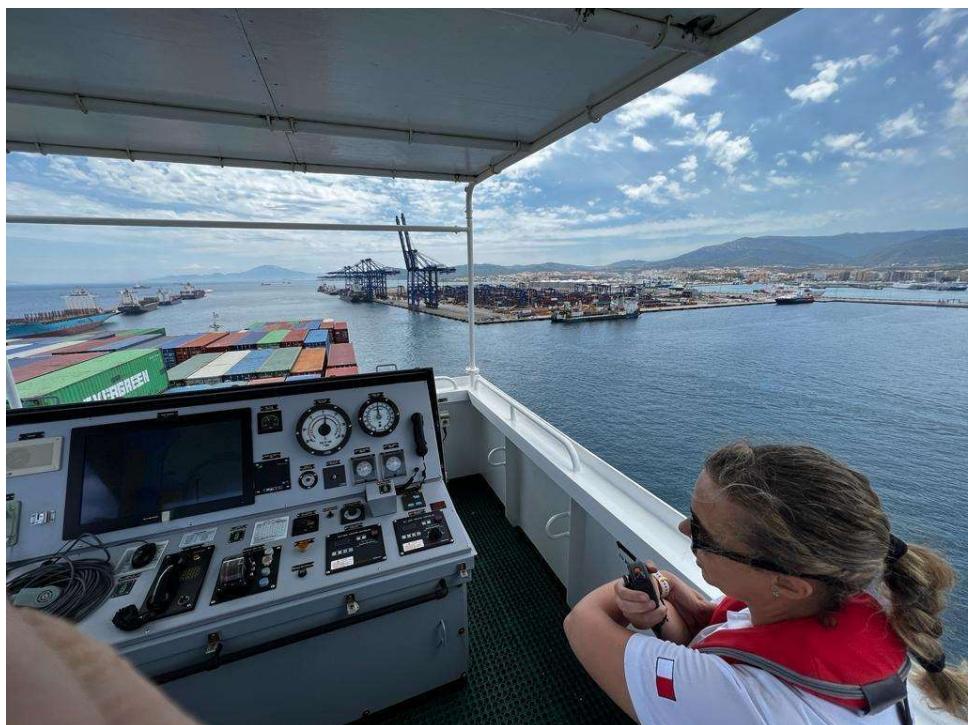


were women, and we had two female cadets on deck. In this way, there was no discrimination on board, even if the Company's policy for the rank of Captain was different. I became the first female Captain in that Company with much hard work and effort and the unconditional support of the maintenance superintendent of the ships I worked on.

In my career at sea, I have sailed in Spain, Northern Europe, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the West African coast. Only in West Africa, I have had to handle situations where I was asked where the Captain was when the Pilot came to the bridge and met the First Mate (female) and myself. Or the Pilot would speak to the First Officer (Male) instead of me. I

must also say that once I was informed the Pilot who filled each role onboard, there was no problem with the manoeuvre.

I first thought about being a Pilot when I was Second Mate and sailing in the Kattegat and Skagerrak Straits and the Kiel Canal. Where the Pilots came on board for the passage, and I liked what they did and how they did it.





As soon as I could, I prepared myself to apply for the position of Pilot. In Spain, it is a long way. To be a Pilot, you must have been a Captain for at least two years. Then, you must pass different national and international legislation exams, particularly knowledge of the port you want to apply for and demonstrate knowledge of ship handling theory. And finally, you have to spend time training in the port where you will be a Pilot.

Currently, I am a Pilot in the port of Algeciras, where I am lucky to work with outstanding colleagues, including Macarena Gil Navarro, the first lady Pilot in Spain, who has always supported me. If you truly want to pursue something, don't hesitate to give it your all, no matter what anyone else thinks. This is my approach, and it has been the key to my success.