



From top: Flying, Sydney Harbour, Chelsea FC, Ben's Olympic medals, Pebble Beach golf course, Lord Nelson, Ben and the JP Morgan BAR team and the America's Cup trophy



The prized possession you value above all others... My five Olympic medals [four golds and one silver]. They represent a lifetime of effort.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I wish I'd spent more time with loved ones. The dedication it takes to be a professional sailor has meant I've missed weddings, christenings and birthdays, which has been so frustrating and upsetting for people.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...

I'd wake up on a Sunday and watch Chelsea thrash Spurs on Match Of The Day. After that I'd put on The Andrew Marr Show and read the newspapers, then play golf at Pebble Beach, California, with my mates. My girlfriend Marit and I would have great seafood for lunch at Catalina restaurant by Sydney Harbour. I'd spend the afternoon sailing around the harbour, then head to Las Vegas for a major night out with friends: we'd have Japanese for dinner at Nobu, then party at the Wynn hotel.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Coffee. I drink at least three cups a day. Being careful with my diet is a way of life and it's never easy.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Great Expectations by Charles Dickens. It's about never knowing what to expect from life.

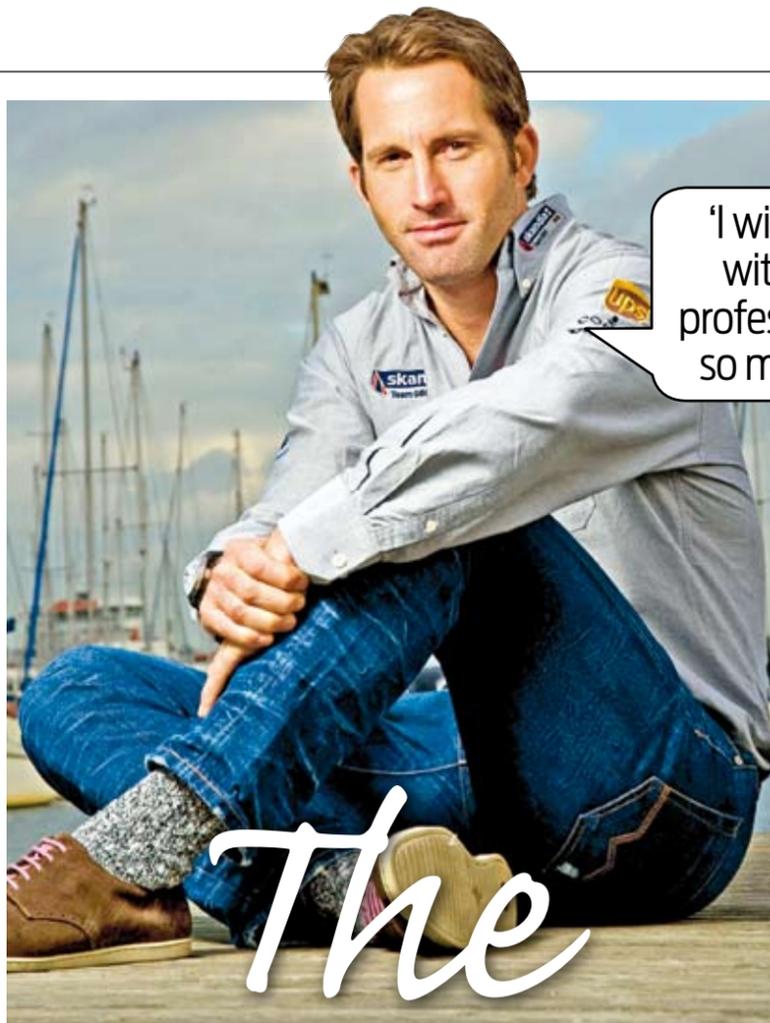
The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd sit in the Tory Chief Whip's office and see some discipline being dished out to MPs. I'm hoping it would be reminiscent of Francis Urquhart in House Of Cards.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Lack of manners and arrogance.

The film you can watch time and time again... The Godfather Part II. I love the scene when Al Pacino's in the boathouse looking slightly psychotic after he's ordered his brother Fredo to be killed. The acting is so intense.

The person who has influenced you most... My father Roddy. He sailed as a captain in the first Whitbread Round the World race in 1973. His passion for sailing gave me the bug. He also instilled it in me to always give 100 per cent.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Lord Nelson. In his day, sailors were really tough and it must have taken huge skill to sail those big ships. I'd love to hear him talk about the battles of Trafalgar and Copenhagen.



'I wish I'd spent more time with loved ones. Being a professional sailor I've missed so much and upset people'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's Olympic sailing hero Ben Ainslie

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Make sure you find something you love to do in life.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I've recently started taking flying lessons. I've only been up a few times, but it's amazing.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My grandfather was a Spitfire pilot in World War II and he gave me all his medals before he died, but I was only six and I lost them!

The unending quest that drives you on... To win the America's Cup finals in San Francisco in September and bring it back to Britain where it all began in 1851. We came up with the concept, but since that first race around the Isle of Wight we've never won it.

The poem that touches your soul... Invictus by William Ernest Henley. It's a powerful reminder to be strong in the face of adversity. As a sportsman you need to be good at that.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... Maybe people mistake my competitive character with my normal character. I'm very focused when I'm competing, but out of the boat I'm much more relaxed.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... The first time I went sailing on my own. I was eight and my parents had bought me an Optimist – a single-handed dinghy – for Christmas. On Boxing Day, they pushed me off the beach in Cornwall and I sailed to meet them at a pub. The sense of freedom was incredible.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd love to try and steal the Mona Lisa. Now that would be a blast!

The song that means most to you... Midnight City by French electronic band M83. It's the theme song we use for our America's Cup Team. It fires us up.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Winning my fourth gold medal on home waters at Weymouth. Hearing thousands of people cheering as I crossed the line was overwhelming.

The saddest time that shook your world... The London bombings in 2005. Many people were on a high because London had just won the bid to host the Olympics, then that horrific act caused so much suffering.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I'm 36 now and I'd love to have children one day. Sailing isn't ideal for family life.

The philosophy that underpins your life... If you want to succeed, you have to give everything and commit fully.

The order of service at your funeral... I'll probably leave my family to work everything out, but I'm sure Jerusalem will be on the hymn sheet.

The way you want to be remembered... As a great sailor and a good man.

The Plug... Ben and his JP Morgan BAR team will compete in the America's Cup World Series event in Naples from 17-21 April. Visit www.jpmorganbarblog.com or www.benainslie.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Hit Broadway musical Once – set in a Dublin bar – arrives at London's Phoenix Theatre on Tuesday. Andrea Riseborough (right) stars in Tom Cruise thriller Oblivion – in cinemas from Friday. And English Electric, the new album from synth-poppers OMD, is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Homeland's David Harewood on why his children stopped him going off the rails
- Behind the scenes on chilling new whodunnit Ice Cream Girls
- Jamie Oliver makes the most of delicious spring produce
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings