



# The ROYAL Treatment

AN IRAQ VET AND FUTURE DUKE TURNS POSH RIDES INTO JOBS FOR RETURNING SOLDIERS.

By Daisy Prince

Captain Charles Bowmont, a.k.a. the Marquis of Bowmont and Cessford and the future Duke of Roxburghe, is 34 years old, single, and heir to a thriving 52,000-acre estate, Floors Castle, and a fortune reputedly worth \$122 million. So you could be forgiven for assuming that his primary pursuit might be something other than starting a business. But, as the captain says, “at some stage Dad is going to do a handover, and my career was always likely to be focused on the family business. Having such a great inheritance is a blessing, but it does potentially channel what your life plan might be.”

Another family tradition is military service; an Innes-Ker (the family name; Bowmont is the title) has served in nearly every British Army conflict in the last century. “We’ve always been warring Scottish Reivers,” he says. He spent an “intense” six years in the services, including a stint in the Maysan

Desert in Iraq. “We lived out of our vehicles in 100-degree heat. I spent a lot of time roaming the sand dunes, playing hide-and-seek, trying to intercept those smuggling weapons into Iraq.” The experience, he says, “inspired me to put something back, to balance the books in appreciation.”

That turned out to be **Capstar**, a startup that trains veterans to be private drivers. It’s not precisely a philanthropy, as the company intends to turn a profit, but by exclusively hiring veterans it does address a social problem. It’s sound business, but it’s also good-hearted and right-minded, principles that most philanthropies aspire to.

The idea came to the marquis over dinner. “I was at Bellamy’s restaurant with Rob [Bassett Cross, his colleague and co-founder], talking about how difficult reintegration can be for ex-soldiers, when he



**SERVICE INDUSTRY**  
Clockwise from top left: Bowmont, in Iraq in 2007; with co-founder Rob Bassett Cross; a Capstar car and driver in New York; former Black Hawk pilot Martinez.

and I looked at each other and said, ‘Let’s try to do something.’ Civilian life is easier if you have a good education and networks to steer you in the right direction, but if you’ve been in the infantry those skills can be harder to translate. Your most obvious option is to go into private security.”

Capstar, which just completed its 10,000th ride in London, strives to capitalize on the best qualities of veterans: unflinching politeness, punctuality, attention to detail, and route planning. The structure of the company mirrors military ranks, with drivers reporting to officers at the top to create squadrons or platoons. The fleet is largely made up

of Jaguars and Land Rovers, whose maker, Tata Motors, has supported Capstar from the beginning. (Jaguar Land Rover also served as the official transport for the Invictus Games, Prince Harry’s Paralympic tournament for wounded and injured soldiers.) This mix of posh rides and alacrity has already proved a good fit with aristocrats, CEOs, and David Beckham. Bowmont hopes to persuade a friend and fellow soldier who served directly with him—Prince Harry—to take a ride soon.

The U.S. arm of Capstar launched in New York in September. On this side of the pond the managing

director is Casey Martinez, a female Black Hawk pilot who was awarded a Bronze Star and four air medals for her service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Martinez has found that American companies eager to hire soldiers have encountered difficulties, since so few have training in law or finance. “Using a car service driven by veterans is a very easy way to support them,” says Martinez, who notes that employees range from just-returning GIs in their twenties to a Vietnam vet. “Eight out of our 10 drivers have served in Iraq or Afghanistan.”

The captain and future duke, no stranger to hierarchy himself, knows that family duty will eventually call and his time at Capstar will end—which is actually a cheering thought, given his desire to pass the responsibility on to a deserving veteran. “After five or 10 years of building the company,” Bowmont says, “there will undoubtedly be another young officer who will be able to run this business well.” «