

IN AT THE DEEP END

Ed Curtis

In our new column, All at Sea throws willing guinea pigs in at the deep end to try a totally new watersports experience. Read on to discover if our newbies sink or swim...



New year, new challenge

With just less than a year to go until the 2013 Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, it's proving a steep learning curve for two friends who decided to take on the extreme nautical test of rowing non-stop across the Atlantic Ocean.



Atlantic is the most incredible thing we have ever owned. Built by Rossiters in Christchurch using carbon/Kevlar composite materials, she is stunning. Flat out on a calm day will smash through the three knot barrier!

The reason for this madness? In 2009 Nick's wife, Ellen, was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 33. With two small children this was something totally unexpected and incredibly traumatic for the family. Following extensive surgery Ellen has made an amazing recovery and is backing us all the way to complete this campaign and raise money for research into preventing a disease that affects both men and women all over the world.

My wife, Nicola, and my two children have been incredible in both understanding why we want to do this

and in letting me undertake such a lengthy challenge.

COUNTING DOWN

Nick and I are preparing as best we can for a journey into the unknown. We start on 2 December 2013 in La Gomera in the Canary Islands, and will finish around sixty days later in English Harbour, Antigua, approximately 2600nm away.

Our little boat will be completely self-sufficient, making its own water and carrying all the food we need to survive the crossing.

The cabin roof is covered in solar panels to power our electronic equipment and water maker. We will have various means of communication whilst at sea, including an iridium phone and VHF radio. This will mean we can update our audio blog and keep

followers entertained with our tales from the Atlantic.

Fans of the race will be able to follow us via satellite tracker to see how we are doing as well. A GPS chart plotter and auto helm will keep us on course, but we will also have obtained our RYA Ocean Yacht Masters (theory) – a requirement of the race rules just in case we need to use more traditional methods to find our way.

We will row non-stop 24/7 in shifts of two hours on, two hours off to get to the finish line and meet our loved ones and, we hope, celebrate raising our target £250,000 for Breakthrough.

The race is organised by Atlantic Campaigns SL and as part of our race entry fee of £16,000 they will ship the boat to La Gomera a month or so before we set off.

Nick and I will then meet Breakthrough Atlantic on the island on 18 November where we spend two weeks finalising our training and prep for the big day! Breakthrough will be scrutinised to make sure that she complies with race rules and to ensure our safety.

Food and calorie intake are vitally important as each day we will burn around 8000 calories. It is impossible to recoup all this energy and we expect to lose around 20 percent of our body weight - which will make our wives happy!

Breakthrough Atlantic will carry ninety days' worth of freeze dried rations that we just add boiling water to make edible. We have tried a variety of different makes and are still deciding which will keep us the most energised and amused on the long days ahead.

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During the trip we will face sleep deprivation, 40ft waves, shipping, whales, incredible heat and humidity, salt sores and much much more! To prepare for this we are training hard on rowing machines for hours at a time, weight training, swimming, and building core stability.

Whenever possible we get out on our amazing boat to try and have at least some idea of what we are going to experience. At the moment she is being stored at Marine Engineering Services in Felinheli on the Menai Strait.

Prior to this challenge, Nick and I had had limited experience of rowing. We have rowed at school age, myself in Pembrokeshire long boats and Nick in a skiff. Our day jobs are both very different and Nick works in the financial sector as a partner in a boutique investment company; I am an RYA Dinghy Coach and Windsurfing Trainer at Plas Menai National Watersports Centre.

We both love the sea and hope our determination to raise £250K will see us to the finish line.

Learn more at www.breakthroughatlantic.com; contact breakthroughatlantic@yahoo.co.uk for corporate sponsorship opportunities.

COLD dark winter nights combined with red wine are a great combination for me to come up with my most ridiculous ideas for a challenge. When asked by my mate Nick Rees what sort of challenge I could think of to raise money for Breakthrough Breast Cancer I immediately said, "racing across the Atlantic in a rowing boat".

Nick laughed at me and filled up his wine glass, quickly moving on to another less daft idea. Not one to be put off, I kept on nagging until Nick began to

realise I was serious. About three weeks after our wine fuelled discussion I got the call from Nick to say, "Come on then, let's do this and raise loads of money for Breakthrough."

So, the idea was hatched in February 2012 and by May we became the proud owners of a boat that won last year's race, Box Number 8. We have scarily invested our own £33,000 to purchase her, and she is amazing.

Measuring only 7m in length and a little under 2m wide, Breakthrough

