



**LIFE**  
Issue 30  
**AT THE  
EXTREME**

[www.VolvoOceanRace.org](http://www.VolvoOceanRace.org)

**Beware  
Murphy's Law**

**Best of  
the one-liners**

**VOLVO  
OCEAN  
RACE**

2008 - 2009

ROCK TOMLINSON/PAUL COOPER/ALICE



# THE MISSION

WORDS: SOPHIE LUTHER

I woke up early on start day knowing I was in for a long and very adventurous mission. The wind, whistling so hard against the window panes, and the crashing of the sea below told me that the storm had definitely not abated while I was asleep.

People joked over breakfast, saying "rather you than me" and "good luck" when I explained our mission. We were to try and keep up with the world's fastest monohulls in a storm which would see them reaching speeds up to 30 knots. We had been asked to film, photograph and write about the dash from Alicante to the Straits of Gibraltar. No small ask as I nervously looked out the breakfast room window of the warm dry hotel at the tempest outside.

The crowds built all morning and so did the excitement ahead of the start. But it was without the regal pomp and ceremony of the visiting King Juan Carlos that our motley crew set on our way, with bags, cameras and kit being thrown onboard and very short goodbyes. Businesslike, we cast off the lines of the Water Wizard, our home for the next three days.

The Water Wizard is a 50-foot catamaran, purpose built for ocean filming and photography by its owners, Steven and Bruna. It took years of research to finish their million-dollar dream, but, as we steamed towards the start line,

we realised it had paid off for both them and us.

The start at 1400 was a hectic, wet and windy affair with a gusty 25 knots from the north-east making for exciting images and footage before we had even left the Bay of Alicante. We had on board a few extra crew members from Volvo Ocean Race TV for an hour after the gun to make the best of the action before transferring them to a rib.

Most looked a little green but relieved to get off, especially the sound man, who had to be stopped from jumping off the back of the boat whilst shouting: "I'd rather \*\*\*\* swim home than stay out here!"

And then there were six of us, looking at each other, holding on for dear life, as we flew downwind, only just keeping up. We intrepid editorial crew consisted of Dave 'Danger' Kneale, the photographer,

Shane the cameraman, Sue Turton, the seafaring Channel 4 presenter, and myself. Sue had taken on the assignment less than 24 hours previously when she heard what we were trying to achieve and had sold it to her news editor. After a quick piece to camera while being thrown from one side to the other, being doused with freezing cold water, and smiling through it all, we all realised she was certainly up for the challenge.

As Alicante disappeared from sight and all but a few helicopters were left with us and the racing boats, we tried to pack as much as we could 'in the can'. But disaster struck when the all-important camera broke, jeopardising recording the action. Grand plans of high lining a new camera kit were banded around whilst we huddled round the Iridium Phone, but the eventual Plan B



Sophie Luther hard at work

was a lot less glamorous. We headed straight for Cartagena, our nearest port, to meet a four-wheel drive Volvo bringing a new camera.

After the rapid transfer of equipment outside a Burger King, with confused onlookers staring at our Volvo Ocean Race orange jumpsuits, we were heading out into a now calmer Mediterranean. Any thoughts that life might be a little easier for the next few hours were short lived as we soon received a worrying 'phone call from our team back in Alicante. Telefónica Blue had a problem. It was something to do with one of their rudders and the steering system below-deck. We should go and find them.

It was going to be like finding a needle in a hay-stack, especially as darkness had just descended. So we rang the Duty Officers in Race HQ, who track and look after the boats



DAVE KNEALE/VOLVO OCEAN RACE

24 hours a day when they are at sea: if anyone could tell us where they were, they could. Within minutes we had a latest position and were skipping our way over the waves at 24 knots towards the struggling Spanish boat.

It didn't take long before we saw their working floodlight on the back of the boat, shining like a beacon in the darkness. As we raced towards them we realised we must look like a drug-running boat as they shone their torches on the sails in a bit of a fluster. But, as soon as they made out our familiar shape, they went back to work in earnest, leaving us to watch their silhouettes.

Then the dilemma struck – what should we do? Should we wait and see if Telefónica Blue would sail to the nearest port, or

BOAT: TONAL ROYAL PHOTO OCEAN RACE

should we carry on through the night to catch up with the front-runners, who, as we spoke, were extending their lead in the bigger breeze ahead. We decided to head along the shore towards Gibraltar unaware that this was the same tactic the leaders had chosen to take in the dying wind.

At breakneck speed, as we wove through the night, Britna and I saw a very distinctive set of lights off our port bow and then a second about a mile from that. A quick check on the radar and we decided to have a look.

The distinctive three bold lines of the Ericsson logo could be made out in the moonlight as we motored up in the silence of the now calm sea. The crew had obviously gone into their watch routine already, so only a few were on the deck, pushing the boat as hard as they could in what little breeze they had to work with. Curiosity got the better of us after a while, so we decided to investigate why the mystery boat a mile to the south was.

We couldn't believe it as we came upon what was certainly not the sea and black if Mostro we had been expecting, but the Nordic crew of Ericsson 3. The sister ships were neck and neck in the lead and both were snurring each other on. As day broke over the Swedish boats, they entered the last miles of the Mediterranean, with the Rock of Gibraltar as an inspiring backdrop for the final push into the Atlantic.

We could clearly see the beaming smile of Anders Lewander, skipper of Ericsson 3, while speaking to him over the handheld VHF. We are in great spirits, but pretty tired. We have all been working

really hard overnight, he said, while looking at Ericsson 4 to starboard coming across the bay from the northern side.

After a radio interview and a bit of banter about how smelly the boat already was, we left them to fight it out with Torben Grael and the International crew to the exit-guarding lighthouse at Tenfa and out into the Atlantic heading for Cape Town.

It was then time to find the rest of the fleet among the growing number of super-tankers passing through the bottleneck entry to the Med. But soon enough, we caught sight of Green Dragon and its ever-amusing crew. Bowman Andrew Mclean was up the rig as we approached, pulling off

some Pirates of the Caribbean acting for the cameras.

Ian Walker was pleased as punch to be third after 24 hours, especially with the problems they had had with a hailday since the start. As we spoke, a photo-boat and spectator RIB turned up from nowhere to see the Volvo Open 70 up close. The news was out the Volvo were in town!

Before we knew it, PUMA was upon us too, with their distinctive red sails we could

see them for miles. So much for stealth mode. In the sunset their red hull blew everyone away. Even though they had been at sea for over 24 hours, and had the proverbial kicked out of them for the first few hours, the boat reflected the water and light making us all agree she was undoubtedly the most beautiful boat out here.

And, yes, we know, we have to be unbiased, but it was breathtaking. We could hear skipper Ken Read and the guys talking urgently about what they should do as the breeze was dropping rapidly to nothing all around them. All they could do was follow Green Dragon into the wind hole. As we left

them to their tough decisions, the media crew member, Rick Deppe, started waving at us and pointing at himself. We rushed to get the binoculars only to find that he was now stood on the stern holding a piece of paper, on which he sarcastically had written 'HELP!' He will certainly keep the crew amused if nothing else.

Our thoughts now turned to the limping Telefonica Blue, last heard making a decision

to go into port. Following them through the Strait we were still unsure if they were going to retire, as they had been making very good speed for many hours, but, just before 2100 local time, we spoke to them on the radio and they confirmed they were going into Algeciras next to the Rock of Gibraltar.

We followed them in nervously, waiting to see what the mood would be like on the dock. Pulling up into a very industrial port with container ships and ferries dwarfing both Telefonica Blue and ourselves, Telefonica moored up next to a police launch leaving us stranded on our boat to watch from afar. Our

told me they had just left the dock fully back on form.

As the sun rose over the rock, we saw the crew grind up the main and silently go about the business of setting the boat up for the long haul out of the tricky straits.

After at least three sail changes and what seemed like 20 tacks, the breeze came up and just off the last lighthouse they hoisted the Code Zero. The power of that sail was incredible, with the boat lurching forward out into the Atlantic with 11 very determined men onboard.

We had accomplished our mission and, in doing that, had the privilege of seeing these amazing boats offshore up close and personal. We had sent back the most up-to-date images and footage we could, to show the world exactly what these teams went through in the first 36 hours of leg one.

# THE MISSION



Courtesy of Seahorse Magazine  
"Life at the Extreme" supplement issue #30  
published to highlight Volvo Ocean Race edition 2008-2009