

Record as Ellen goes it alone

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BRITISH sailor Ellen MacArthur has broken a solo round-the-world record with a time of 71 days 14 hours 18 minutes 33 seconds.

The 28-year-old MacArthur completed the 42 000-kilometre circumnavigation at 29 minutes past midnight (local time) by crossing an imaginary finish line between Ushant, France, and the Lizard peninsula in Cornwall on the south coast of England.

Stormy seas, a broken sail and exhaustion are just some of the obstacles MacArthur has battled.

Her 22.9-metre trimaran B&Q broke the record set by Francis Joyon, who achieved the mark of 72 days 22hr 54min 22sec in February 2004.

MacArthur, who was due to come ashore in Falmouth, said she was physically and mentally exhausted.

MacArthur is the sixth to attempt the feat in a multihull, the fastest and most extreme class of boats on the ocean.

Joyon, a Frenchman, set his record on a 27m trimaran.

MacArthur's journey began on November 28. Since then, she's slept an average of 30 minutes at a time and four hours in any one day.

Freeze-dried meals have been reheated on a single burner stove in a living area measuring 1.5m high and 2m wide. Her water supply is desalinated from the sea.

MacArthur has had to fix her generators and watermaker.

She spent Christmas Day in a storm, but after crossing the halfway mark at Cape Horn on New Year's Eve, built up a four-day lead over Joyon's pace.

A week later, during the worst storms of MacArthur's career, she badly burned her arm on the generator.

MacArthur twice had to climb the 30m mast to repair mainsail damage. During the climbs, she had to effectively sail backward to ensure safe conditions.

"What have I done wrong to deserve this?" she wrote in an e-mail on January 20. "Everything we worked so hard for we are losing. It is so unfair. It has never been so hard."

Struggling in bad weather, MacArthur fell a day behind Joyon's pace. But, by late January, she was back in contention after crossing the equator.

The boat hit a large fish and had a near miss with a whale, then light winds threatened. Then a storm on Saturday helped push her back into the lead. - Sapa-AP



Ellen rides the elements: British sailor Ellen MacArthur aboard the trimaran with which she raced to a solo round the world record. AP PHOTO