

Around-the-world supersailor

Meticulous dedication to detail is one of the keys to Ellen's success

What makes British solo sailor Ellen MacArthur so formidable is "living, dreaming and sleeping" her sport, writes **PAUL NEWMAN**.

Fact file

LONDON: Ellen MacArthur fact file after the British sailor became the fastest person to circumnavigate the globe single-handedly on Tuesday:

Born: July 8, 1976 in Derbyshire, England

1995: Sails around Britain alone on 6.5m yacht.

1997: 17th in Mini Transat solo transatlantic race

1998: 1st in Open 50 class, Route du Rhum

2000: 1st Europe 1 New Man Star transatlantic race

2001: 2nd Vendee Globe solo around-the-world race; 2nd Transat Jacques Vabre with Alain Gautier; Fico world offshore champion

2002: Awarded MBE; wins Route du Rhum in record time

2003: Fails in Jules Verne around-the-world record bid when mast breaks

2004: Misses out on west-east transatlantic record in new trimaran B&Q by 75 minutes

2005: Becomes the fastest person to circumnavigate the globe single-handedly. - Sapa-AFP

LONDON: Ellen MacArthur liked to trot out a statistic or two when she was doing her round of interviews before setting out to break the world record for sailing solo around the globe.

About 1 800 people had climbed Everest, she said, 450 had been in space and 12 had walked on the moon. However, only five people had tried to race a multihull non-stop around the world and only one, Francis Joyon, had succeeded.

It was typical of MacArthur that she prepared so painstakingly for the chore of answering questions she had heard 100 times before. Fully aware of the importance of publicity to her sponsors, she is a marketing executive's dream.

At the launch of her boat in Sydney last year, she took great care to ensure that the French and English photographers and camera crews were pointing their lenses in the right direction - one side of her trimaran bore the logos of B&Q, the other those of Castorama, the French arm of her sponsor's DIY stores.

Nigel Irens, the trimaran's designer, believes it is this dedication to detail that is one of the keys to MacArthur's success.

"When you're at sea one of the key requirements is that you're vigilant," he said. "You have to assume the worst is going to happen all the time. You have to be on the case 24 hours a day. You can never afford to rest on your laurels and you have to worry about everything."

"MacArthur is very good at that, which is also what makes her so formidable during the building stage. She lives, dreams and sleeps it all the time, even when the boat's in the planning stage."

It was at the Paris Boat Show just over two years ago that Irens and MacArthur started talking seriously about the building of B&Q, a 29m trimaran designed specifically for MacArthur to sail solo in pursuit of speed records.

MacArthur was involved in the project at every stage and was almost a permanent fixture in the final two months of construction at a Sydney boatyard.

"She's extremely knowledgeable," Irens said. "She was very creative and always knew what she wanted."

MacArthur's attention to detail borders on the obsessive.

When a sailor in the last Vendee Globe single-handed around-the-world race bit off his tongue after being struck on the head and had to sew it back on, MacArthur practised for the same eventuality, using a piece of pigskin.

Growing up in Derbyshire she even moved her bed into the barn to make way for precious sailing gear in her bedroom. Her compelling autobiography, published three years ago, was all her own work.

A life at sea was MacArthur's ambition from the earliest days, despite the fact that her parents,

both teachers, were not from a sailing background. Her passion for the sea was aroused by sailing trips with her aunt.

By the age of eight she was saving her school dinner money to buy her first boat. Ten years later she was working fulltime in yachting as an instructor. Before she was out of her teens she had sailed single-handed around Britain.

In four years of competitive racing MacArthur quickly established herself as a formidable sailor, but it was her performance four years ago in the Vendee Globe that truly captured the public's imagination.

She chased the winner, Michel Desjoyeaux, all the way to the line to finish second in just over 94 days. Victories followed in the Challenge Mondial Assistance and EDS Atlantic Challenge, and at the end of the year she was runner-up in the BBC Sports Personality of the Year awards.

Forever seeking new challenges, MacArthur attempted last year to break the Jules Verne non-stop around-the-world record with a 14-man crew on a giant catamaran. The mission ended when the boat dismasted in the southern ocean. Last summer her first record attempt on B&Q failed by just 75 minutes to set a transatlantic best.

Although her greatest achievements have been as a solo sailor, MacArthur knows the importance of teamwork.

Her campaigns are organised by Offshore Challenges, a company she founded with former rival skipper Mark Turner, which has built a reputation for meticulous professionalism.

Her latest triumph is as much a victory for Offshore Challenges' determination to gain every possible advantage, from the use of satellite technology in the analysis of weather systems to scientific research



VICTORY: British sailor Ellen MacArthur at the end of her solo around-the-world record attempt on Monday off the coast of western France.

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into the skipper's sleep patterns.

At 1.6m tall and only 28, MacArthur's story has captivated the imagination of the French even more than the British (there were more journalists from France than from the British side of the Channel at the launch of B&Q in Sydney last year).

Although she describes herself as "very hard" she also has a deeply sensitive side, often expressed in her passion for nature. Boyfriends have come and gone, though MacArthur likes to keep her life away from sailing as private as possible.

Irens will be among those fas-

cinated to see what MacArthur does next. "You don't do what Ellen's done more than a few times in a lifetime," he said.

"She and Mark Turner have done well to set up a proper business which isn't just a flash in the pan. She's well respected and has good management skills.

"They will focus on other projects using this boat and others. If she's like any of the other people who've done this, she'll probably say 'that's it' in terms of solo around-the-world sailing. But ask her a month later and you might get a different answer." - The Independent

Picture: AP