



SKIP NOVAK

THE GOLDEN GLOBE RACE IS A SIMPLE CONCEPT BUT, LIKE ALL RECREATIONS OF EVENTS PAST, IS ALSO FULL OF COMPROMISES BY NECESSITY

I have taken a new interest in the Golden Globe Race. How can we not? Peter Nichols, the author who wrote the acclaimed book *A Voyage for Madmen* chronicling the 1968 epic might be already contemplating the sequel. *A Voyage for Madmen and One Woman* could be a title, or maybe, more politically correctly, *A Voyage for Mad Persons*.

Out of 18 starters, eight are left. The attrition rate is impressive at halfway around the world and there is a lot of stormy ocean left for the remainers to negotiate. Best of luck to them!

The concept of looking back in time to celebrate achievements of our past heroes is always worthwhile. The ‘test voyages’ of Tim Severin, including the leather boat *Brendan* that was sailed from Ireland to North America and Thor Heyerdahl’s *Kon-Tiki* both come to mind, but they were academic endeavours using traditional vessels built with traditional materials in order to prove a hypothesis. And there was a lot of real adventure into the

mix – this was well before the age of satellite phones and rescues on tap.

There have also been many journeys following the classic exploratory polar treks. For decades

this has been a regular feature for adventurers: to follow in the footsteps of Scott, Amundsen, Shackleton and others. The idea is to emulate their achievements by pitting yourself against the same conditions in weather and terrain. A nice thing to do, for sure, and that is about the extent of the value – a very personal journey with publicity attached or not.

Of course, some of these projects get all blown out of proportion and ludicrous comparisons are made between then and now. To set off on a polar journey using anything but the most modern equipment and using current techniques would be foolhardy, so any comparisons of like-for-like are very debatable, if not specious.

However, Tim Jarvis in 2007 went one step further with an attempt in recreating Douglas Mawson’s survival story in the Antarctic using traditional equipment and supplies. In 2013, he attempted to follow the famous Shackleton

boat journey by using a replica *James Caird*. The crew dressed in traditional clothing and used navigation equipment from the day.

When people asked me what I thought about it all, my stock reply was: “Impressive, but they did not eat the penguins,” meaning that, however you try to recreate a piece of history, it can never be 100% authentic, so you have to be careful what you intend, claim and why.

To emulate the original version is quite impossible for all sorts of reasons, not least of which it doesn’t have to be attempted in the first place. Mawson’s and Shackleton’s men had no choice in order to survive. Having said all this, from an educational perspective Tim’s project was a job superbly done, reaching a wide audience.

The Golden Globe Race has sort of found itself in the same boat. Being a back to basics project by definition, it should be reasonably simple, but the Notice of Race is very complex indeed. It is full of compromises both for safety and legal reasons. It remains a great adventure for the participants but many people will question the concept of setting off on a sea voyage, let alone a race around the world without modern, standard, seafaring equipment. This also implies the design of the boat itself.

I’m not a nut on safety but I can very much appreciate that having a boat rigged and equipped from the 1960s compared to what is available now would inherently put people at some risk. I think we are seeing the evidence of this in the drop-out rate. And, let’s be frank, Robin Knox-Johnston’s *Suhaili* was anything but state of the art in 1968. A convenient analogy in revisiting a famous yachting competition would be the mighty J Class. They are full of carbon fibre, titanium and modern sail control systems. Doing it in the original way as they were built and equipped would be a non-starter.

For myself, who knows only too well how much time it takes to do a ‘day’s work’ of celestial navigation, I can imagine the participant’s time is indeed short for many other daily urgencies, assuming they are doing their calcs on a blank sheet of paper. The temptation to smuggle on a US\$300 Garmin GPS must have been huge – a piece of equipment that can easily be thrown overboard before the finish.

Too harsh an assessment? Well, let’s not forget Donald Crowhurst! ■

‘A RE-CREATION CAN’T BE 100% AUTHENTIC’