



SKIP NOVAK

SKIP IS ON STANDBY TO WELCOME OR ASSIST HIS FRIEND FEDOR KONYUKHOV, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST INCREDIBLE, ALMOST SUPERHUMAN, ADVENTURERS

There is no denying that many things Russian are not the flavour of the month, any month in the last few years. In spite of somewhat bad press all around, there is a good news Russian story that is noteworthy and hard to ignore, at least for those of us who float.

On 5 December, Fedor Konyukhov, a 67-year-young adventurer started an epic row from Dunedin in New Zealand through the Southern Ocean intending to complete a circumnavigation in three summer stages through 2020. Stage 1 to Cape Horn is expected to take 120 days.

This is the Holy Grail for rowers. Several people have tried in recent years but none has got very far. Attempts have been made from Tasmania, New Zealand and the Falklands. Some went round in circles and others almost froze to death. They all had to be rescued in one fashion or another.

This kind of adventure, which can rightly be considered a stunt, is not my cup of tea, but I am watching this one as I think Fedor might have a chance, at least in getting himself near Cape Horn. The last time I met him was in

2012 when he was displaying his then rowing machine at the Southampton Boat Show. I didn't take much notice, but

in 2014 he rowed her 9,400 nautical miles from Chile to Australia, non-stop and unsupported in 159 days. That was in warm water, but he has more than enough experience in the cold. You can follow him on konyukhov.ru/en

Fedor's life is an overwhelming history of adventure expeditions that is more than impressive and I challenge anyone out there to best his record, not only in volume but variety. He is a Knox-Johnston/Chris Bonington/Richard Branson et al all rolled into one. You name it: mountaineering; polar journeys; around the world yacht racing; ballooning around the world; dog sledding journeys and racing and desert crossings are some of his feats.

Nevertheless, there are disbelievers out there. You can go online to read the scientific analysis disputing the transpacific row, saying it is not in the realm of possibility for a human. So, in addition to all of Fedor's accomplishments, he is also an enigma wrapped in a mystery.

But there is yet more to him. Eclectic is an accurate description of Fedor. He is a prolific artist, an author of 20 books and builds Russian Orthodox chapels in his spare time – a man deeply religious. In 2010 he was ordained as a Russian orthodox priest. His medals and accolades for adventure, his art and writing on the Russian front go on and on. On an admittedly more tame voyage in 2011 his Russian group chartered my yachts *Pelagic* and *Pelagic Australis* for a Beagle Channel and round Cape Horn cruise. Fedor arrived on board bearing a Russian Orthodox cross which they erected on Cape Horn Island.

Portrait of an icon

I visited Fedor's chapel in downtown Moscow a few years ago to collaborate with his son and manager, Oscar, who often provides Russian clients to Pelagic Expeditions. I recommend anyone on a visit to Moscow to see Fedor's art and memorabilia that adorns the chapel, along with many of his icons to seafarers. There is no doubt Fedor has God on his side, and no doubt quite a few Russian oligarchs who back these campaigns either privately or through their businesses. If they are doing this altruistically, good on them, but I suspect it also has a lot to do with projecting what is surely a Russian success story. It is strange, though, that Fedor is not better known outside of Russia beyond the various adventure genres he is so much part of.

Fedor's very high tech rowing boat *AKROS*, designed by Brit Phil Morrison, really looks the business and clearly a lot of thought has gone into this project, especially for life support systems. And the boat is well sea trialled. Most of these rowing expeditions must be down-current and downwind, so it is debatable how much time is actually spent propelling yourself by the oars, and how much is accountable to drift. Nevertheless, a Southern Ocean row is all about surviving it.

The point of this story is that I was recently given a heads up on this project in respect of providing support at Cape Horn for Fedor's arrival. Needless to say, the Chilean Navy has rescued more than their fair share of round the world yachts both racing and cruising, and it would be nice if he does need help to do so privately, so both *Pelagics* will be standing by. And I have to. One of Fedor's icons to seafarers is on our bulkhead on *Pelagic Australis*. ■

'I CHALLENGE ANYONE TO BEST HIS RECORD'