

SKIP NOVAK

ARE 'RETRO' RACE COMPETITORS BETTER OFF BEING LEFT TO BATTLE THE ELEMENTS UNDISTURBED?

The start of the Golden Globe Race is less than a year away and there are 27 competitors including my race favourite, Kirsten Neuschäfer, the only female entry and our beloved *Pelagic* veteran of many years.

As I have alluded to previously, I'm not a huge fan of these retro events. They attempt to recreate something that is not possible to achieve in the truest sense. They start out with an ideology and along the way many compromises are made to address safety and the realities of this day and age. Having said that, the interest of many would-be circumnavigators has taken hold and the event is a winning formula; hats off to Don McIntyre.

One of those compromises is the media. You cannot run an event like this as it was in 1968 – the whole show depends on getting stories from the skippers out to the wider public. There's no turning the clock back on this necessity, but a dilemma exists.

I can't help wonder what Bernard Moitessier would have made of the required media gates along the way where competitors drop off USB sticks and do an interview while coming in contact with points of land during what should be a no holds barred race around the world. I think he'd be rolling around in fits of Gallic laughter.

The fleet is required to pass close aboard Cape Town harbour which took me and many of my deep water cronies aback. For a logical, safe, passage yachts on any non-stop around the world race should, by the time they are at the longitude of Cape Town, be at least 400 miles south and stuck into the following winds of the Southern Ocean. Arriving into Cape Town can be problematic battling storm force south-easters coming off the land, which are a regular feature during the summer season.

Leaving can be more tricky. Not only can the south-easter bring you up short in trying to make southing, but more serious is the temptation to cut the corner across the Agulhas Bank rather than dip south to avoid it.

This is ship breaking country, where the west-going Agulhas current pushes into the prevailing westerlies at two to three

knots creating big and confused seas. If you follow the shortest course coming off a stop in Cape Town, there is a zone where the Agulhas Bank at 200m dives down to over 3,000m over a distance of 20 miles. On the way back from Marion Island on a charter we jumped over this ledge and had to drop all sails in a panic when tossed and twisting around like a cork from rail to rail and bow down to stern down. It lasted but half an hour, but it was dramatic. *Pelagic Australis* is 74ft. This condition could easily capsize a 36-footer.

Another media stop into Storm Bay, Tasmania, is also a circumnavigator's bête noire, as it takes you out of the rhythm of the Southern Ocean and into variable conditions and up an estuary! Some will get lucky with a quick in-and-out, while others could be becalmed and languish for days.

The fact is, deviating from a logical route introduces situations where these small boats might be obliged to beat their guts out to an

interview when they could be sliding off on a reach, safely along the course. This holds true for all the Southern Ocean 'marks of the course' whether they be islands or virtual buoys defining a maximum southern latitude

I'm reminded of Josh Hall's Class 40 Global Ocean Race in 2011/12 where he had a virtual buoy to round in the South Pacific to keep the fleet out of the ice. They found themselves on a gruelling windward leg in the Southern Ocean. Two boats retired to due to damage or lack of will. That was in open ocean. What's worse, trying to weather a sub-Antarctic island to avoid a time penalty can put a boat on a lee shore.

Unlike the IMOCA 60s travelling at a speed that can run from weather, I'd like to offer the opinion, unwelcome as it might be, that the GGR boats with tortoise-like speeds at mercy of the weather are more at risk in fighting big seas and winds while trying to round marks than they are at risk of hitting ice. I think the southern max limit should be abolished as we all know going too far south is too risky not only for ice, but also for possible headwinds. These natural limits should be implied and understood rather than regulated for. ■

'These small boats might beat their guts out'

