

In Gear

31

GADGET FIX
CLEAN IN 30
SECONDS: YOUR
PEARLY WHITES
WILL THANK YOU



ROB SCOTT

Around the world without a safety net

Sailing solo round the globe is tough, but doing it with no modern tech is really in at the deep end. Dubliner Gregor McGuckin is ready for the sea change, he tells *Yvonne Gordon*

A tape recorder, a typewriter and a sextant – not things you would expect a modern-day sailor to want to take on a solo race around the world. But for this event, Dubliner Gregor McGuckin and his fellow contestants are having to dive into the past, hence the list of traditional items they can take with them – and the longer list of modern items that they cannot.

McGuckin is taking part in the Golden Globe Race – a 30,000-mile (48,280km)

non-stop sprint around the planet on a yacht – and its rules mean that he cannot have any 21st-century tech on board. That means no phone, computer, tablet or any type of internet. He will have no GPS for navigation, no electronic autopilot, not even a digital watch or camera. He will be at sea for eight or nine months with no outside assistance and without stopping.

The race, which started as The Sunday Times Golden Globe Race in 1968, is marking its 50th anniversary with a retro edition, in which

entrants must solely use 1960s technology. For navigation, they will use paper charts, a compass and an old-fashioned sextant to measure the angles between the sun, stars and moon and the horizon. Weather forecasts will come from the radio and by using a barometer.

McGuckin aims to be the first Irish person to complete a non-stop lap of the planet, and it's a tough challenge: only 200 individuals have ever sailed solo around Cape Horn in South America – this race will also take in Africa's Cape of Good Hope and Australia's

Cape Leeuwin – and fellow Irish sailor Enda O'Coineen was dismayed last year while competing in another solo round the world race, the Vendee Globe. This year, 18 sailors have entered the Golden Globe, which departs today from Les Sables-d'Olonne in western France. McGuckin, 31, is the second-youngest skipper – the oldest is 73 and the youngest, the only female entrant, is 28 – and they are all racing in boats 9-11 metres long.

A few days before the race, he is on the dock, finalising his preparations. "A lot is normal

McGuckin sets sail on the 50th anniversary 'retro' Golden Globe

stuff – a safety inspection, ensuring everything is there – and little things like seasickness tablets in the emergency grab bag. I am reading the list 10 or 15 times, checking it all off." There is emergency equipment on board, including satellite position beacons, radar transponders and a sealed bag with a phone in it, but these are a last resort.

McGuckin and the other
Continued on page 28 →



McGuckin will depend on radio and traditional navigating tools

skippers have had many safety briefings, including on medical issues. With no crew on board to help, if they find themselves ill or injured thousands of miles from land or rescue, they need to be able to deal with any type of crisis, including giving themselves injections and even stitches. “The biggest risk is the isolation,” he says. “If a simple injury or cut gets infected, you’re potentially quite far from home.”

McGuckin will bring enough food supplies for nine months, a combination of freeze-dried and tinned, plus some instant meals and a gas burner to heat everything. He will only have fresh food for the first couple of weeks as he has chosen to bring a coolbox instead of a fridge (old-school refrigerators are allowed, but he doesn’t want something that could break down). As a water desalination and purification system is not allowed, he will take 450 litres of water – enough for around four months – after which he will have to collect rainwater.

Sleeping will be tricky as McGuckin cannot use an autopilot to steer, but he will use wind vane self-steering, which steers by the wind. “If the wind changes direction, the boat changes direction,” he says. “I can sleep only for short stints, depending on weather and traffic. Generally it will be no longer than 90 minutes.”

One thing on the list that is allowed, but that McGuckin will not be bringing, is a typewriter. “I haven’t a clue if anyone is bringing one,” he laughs. “It’s more hassle than it’s worth in weight.”

He will find his Kindle and MP3 player hard to do without, but is bringing an old car cassette player – and lots of tapes, donated by friends. “I am also bringing a fairly full bookshelf. The boat is pretty packed.”

The retro them attracted McGuckin, who was a relative latecomer to sailing at 19. “In the original race, they had no electricity and no engine,” he says. “That’s what sailing is all about; it’s where it began.

“It’s so easy nowadays to hop on a boat, set up a GPS

and autopilot and just go. You can be quite lazy. With this, everything is relying on you; you become a bit more in tune with everything.

“You hear stories from back in the day; it’s nice to experience it and make your own stories.”

There is no doubt that the skippers will face many challenges: storms and raging seas; doldrums; the threat of collisions in busy shipping lanes and from floating hazards. And as well as having to deal with emergencies alone, the sailors’ greatest issue may well be dealing with being away from friends and family for that length of time, with not one crewmate on board for company. Overall, it’s a risky and lonely pursuit.

“I don’t know how I will react [to the isolation],” says McGuckin. “I might be grand, I might not be.” The longest time he has sailed alone is 10 days – though he has done lots of long passages so says he knows what to expect.

“The vast majority of the race there’s very low risk,” he insists. “If something major breaks, it’s about managing that risk as best as possible – making sure you are looking after yourself and doing the same for the boat; trying to identify any issues and repair them before they break. It’s about monitoring as best as possible. If you can do that successfully, you’ll get around.”

One of the riskiest areas on the course is the Southern Ocean, known for its high seas, icebergs and cold temperatures, where the sailors will spend four months. McGuckin has a nervous anticipation: “It will be a first. I am sure I will learn a bit, though it’s a long time to be cold, wet and remote.”

He is looking forward to the experience and what he is most excited about is getting to the starting line. “It has been so busy; so many sleepless nights as there’s so much to organise. It will be a big relief just to be sailing over the start line. Then it’s just settling into it and seeing how I get on.”

Follow the race at goldengloberace.com

Let’s cruise tonight in the sharp new Cactus

Citroën’s supremely comfortable family hatch proved the perfect runabout for a cross-country dash that took me to Fingal, Ballinlough Castle and Boogie Wonderland, writes *Graeme Lennox*

I always thought parents who took their children to music festivals were selfish.

It’s an excuse to kick back to some tunes and drink in the sunshine while entrusting bewildered kids to wild-eyed circus-performer surrogates. If you’re lucky they teach them how to juggle, but chances are they will emerge having learnt how to skull a can of Dutch Gold while rolling a joint single-handed.

To prove a point, I dragged my wife and son to not one but two festivals in the one day, justifying it under the guise of doing an extended test drive in the new Citroën C4 Cactus.

In north Co Dublin, Flavours of Fingal’s mix of bouncy castles, vintage cars and choo-choo trains was like crack to a fizzy-pop-fuelled four-year-old. But we got an eye-opener when we left our U-rated Glastonbury and drove to Body & Soul at Ballinlough Castle in Co Westmeath where the “bikini

sparkles” dress code left little to the imagination. Fortunately, the cross-country festival dash was completed in one of the most comfortable cars around, so while the family slept, Penneys Dad here could rock out to Earth, Wind & Fire’s greatest hits on the wireless without having to worry about my middle-aged paunch and crap trousers.

When it came out in 2014, the Cactus received acclaim for its daring looks. Launched at a time when hatchback sales were being decimated by the rise of the SUV, it brought something new to the table. Anyone who has been subjected to my views on the original’s air bumps, those colour-coded slabs of puffer jacket that adorned the

flanks, will know I wasn’t a fan. Much like a Healy-Rae, they were harmless enough, but too thick to be of any real purpose.

Thankfully, Citroën decided to shrink the air bumps and move them downwards, so they now just look like “bikini

fancy side skirts. Overall, the Cactus has retained its

upbeat personality, which is a welcome panacea to the aggressive-looking cars and their overly aggressive drivers doing the rounds now.

The new Cactus premieres the brand’s Advanced Comfort seats, which are more like living-room armchairs minus the fag burns than traditional car seats. Made from high-density memory foam, rather than squeeze your non-skinny-jean-wearing frame to within an inch of its life, they provide long-distance comfort and promote good posture.

They’re symptomatic of the Citroën’s cleverly designed, attractive cabin. I’m a big fan of the flat-topped dash and squared-off circle theme that runs throughout the car, from the silver alloy wheels, to the air vents and gear knob.

A 7in touchscreen sits high up on the dash, so traffic is still

in your peripheral vision while you fiddle with your playlists. Meanwhile, the red and black instrument panel is the sort of digital display Kitt from Knight Rider would have killed for. Relocating in-car functions to a touchscreen has made the cockpit clutter-free, but having to press a button to access the air-conditioning is a hassle.

Up front, I had all the leg- and headroom I could ask for, although six-footers will struggle if a panoramic glass roof is specified. Legroom was decent in the back, but middle-seat passengers have to fight it out for space with the people either side of them.

The only gripe I heard from my passengers was when they discovered they could not lower the rear windows.

Citroën has deployed pop-out rear windows, such as the ones from the cars of your youth. Apparently it’s a weight-saving measure, but more weight could have been shed by replacing the mechanical parking brake with an electronic one (for the record, I’m glad you didn’t, Citroën).

The lack of fresh air, combined with all that comfort, has the same effect as chloroform, so I’m told. The boot? Well, it’s not the biggest at 358 litres and there

is a substantial lip to overcome if you’re carrying heavy items. But lower the back seats and you’ve 1,170 litres to play with. Driving the three-cylinder Puretech 130 turbo petrol model, I had no shortage of fun buzzing around the countryside with my passengers passed out in the back. With its sub-nine-second 0 to 100kph sprint time, it’s no slouch. There’s an urgency to the sound of a three-pot



Cleverly designed, clutter-free cabin is well insulated from both wind and engine noise

engine hard at work that I like. Under heavy acceleration they have a tendency to drone, but Citroën has done a great job insulating the cabin against engine noise. The windscreen has been acoustically optimised, and the concave roof design acts like a speaker, radiating noise and vibrations into the atmosphere, rather than having them bouncing around the cabin. In the absence of engine and wind

noise, I did notice the sound of tyres on tarmac, but it was by no means intrusive. Another technology making its debut is Progressive Hydraulic Cushions; not some reference to the Body & Soul dress code, rather a suspension system that replaces traditional springs and bump stops with a pair of hydraulic pillows that even out bumps in the road. At first it feels like being balanced atop

a waterbed because there’s constant lateral and longitudinal movement. But then you notice potholes no longer register with the same crashing ferocity, and start to wonder why more cars aren’t built this way. With such an emphasis on comfort you might expect the Cactus to corner like a barge, but it doesn’t. Light steering and plentiful body roll are complemented by a

CITROËN C4 CACTUS FLAIR PURETECH 130	
Price	€25,795
Engine	1,199cc 3 cylinder turbo petrol
Performance	0 to 100kph in 8.7 secs
Top speed	193kph
Fuel	4.8 litres per 100km
CO2	110g per km
Road tax	Band A3 (€190 a year)
Rating	★★★★☆
Verdict	Prickly pair
On sale	Out now

smooth six-speed manual transmission. The Cactus range starts at €19,995, and right now you can get a €2,000 purchase contribution and up to €3,000 scrappage if you trade in your old banger. There are three trim levels, but most buyers will bypass the entry-level Touch and go for the mid-grade Feel (from €22,495), which comes with 17in wheels, rear parking sensors and a

reversing camera. Flair models, such as the one tested here, start at €24,495 and get all the bells and whistles. All-round parking sensors, autonomous emergency braking, sat nav, keyless entry and start, plus electric folding door mirrors, should make you nigh-on invincible in urban environments and are handy when negotiating festival car parks. After a couple of hazy hours at Body & Soul, the loud music had taken its toll on the wee man, while the sights had taken their toll on Dad (Mum was just exhausted from tutting under her breath at all the hedonistic frivolity), so we decided to head back to our tribe of parents back in Fingal. The revised Cactus still has its flaws, but it’s remarkable what a difference a few carefully thought-out tweaks can make. It proved to be the perfect set of wheels for what ultimately could have been a long and arduous road trip. Last weekend proved me wrong about the Cactus, but it confirmed my suspicions about parents and music festivals . . . which is precisely why I’ll be dropping the family at Flavours of Fingal next year before hightailing it back to Body & Soul on my own.



WILLIAM GROZES