

# Waves smashed up my yacht but Tomy was far worse off



AUSTRALIAN MARITIME SAFETY AUTHORITY/PPL/GGR; CHRISTOPHE FAVREAU; ROB SCOTT; DAMIEN MEYER

*Yvonne Gordon* meets Golden Globe sailor Gregor McGuckin, who went to the aid of his rival – even though his own boat had been dismantled 90 miles away



After McGuckin's yacht was badly damaged during a violent storm, he had to set up a makeshift rig, above; the Hanley Energy Endurance before disaster struck, left; McGuckin, below, had been set to become the first Irishman to complete a non-stop, solo circumnavigation of the world

**W**hen Gregor McGuckin set off in the Golden Globe Race in July he was looking forward to months of sailing alone and becoming the first Irishman to complete a non-stop, solo circumnavigation of the world. The 32-year-old Dubliner was an experienced sailor, with 45,000 ocean miles under his belt.

Little did he know his race would come to a shocking halt and he would have to come to the rescue of a fellow competitor.

The drama kicked off on September 21 when some of the fleet were hit by a massive storm in the Southern Ocean, 82 days into the race. McGuckin's yacht and that of Indian sailor Abhilash Tomy, were rolled and dismantled in 70-knot (130kph) winds and 14m waves. A third, Mark Slats, was also knocked down.

McGuckin and Slats were unharmed but Tomy texted

race headquarters: "ROLLED. DISMASTED. SEVERE BACK INJURY. CANNOT GET UP". When Race Control asked Tomy if he could turn on his satellite phone and emergency positioning indicator, there was no response.

Headquarters issued a Code Red Alert and appealed to the other skippers for help. The nearest yacht was McGuckin's Biscay 36 ketch, the Hanley Energy Endurance, 90 miles to the southwest. He was ready to help but there was one problem: he had lost his mast, auto-pilot and engine.

When the race started on July 1 in Les Sables-d'Olonne in France, 18 skippers aged from 28 to 73 lined up, ready to race non-stop 30,000 miles around the world. For this 50th anniversary edition of the race, they were using 1960s boats and equipment – charts and sextants instead of GPS and computers.

Before the storm hit,



McGuckin was enjoying the race, although the high seas of the Southern Ocean were exhausting. He had a guitar, cassettes and books, but spent most of his time working out weather and tactics. He was sleeping for up to 90 minutes at a time, eating tinned and freeze-dried food. "Life was good," he says. "I'd done delivery passages before and knew what it was like at sea."

On day 82, McGuckin's world turned upside down – literally. Before the storm began, he and Tomy were in a friendly battle for third place and chatted by radio every day. Although they knew that the storm was coming, the winds built quickly. McGuckin's first knock down came in the middle of the night. He was on deck. "It wasn't that violent,

but the whole boat just went completely over," he says. "I was holding on and went in and came back out again." The hit took out his mizzenmast (a small second mast).

But the wind kept building and by midnight it was storm force. McGuckin was getting knocked hard by waves. Even though he had no sails up and was trailing ropes to keep the boat steady, he was still moving at six knots. The wind swung 180 degrees so waves were now coming from both sides. "I have never seen the sea building so quickly," says McGuckin. "Within an hour, it was phenomenally big. I was getting nervous."

The gusts were hitting 80 knots and waves were picking up the boat. "You could see the waves collide; they were

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# McGee

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# Sunday InGear



Tomy was trapped in his bunk after he was badly injured

breaking from both directions. It was terrifying.”

McGuckin took refuge below deck. During one break in the waves, he opened the hatch and saw a wall of white water. “I just got inside in time, shut the hatch and the boat was just picked up. I didn’t even get a chance to grab on to anything. I was slammed into the roof of the boat, things flying everywhere, everything pitch black, before the boat came back up again.”

When he looked out, he saw the mast hanging over the side of the boat. With the storm still raging, McGuckin had to cut away the mast to stop it putting a hole in the boat. He admits it was terrifying, especially going over the wave crests: “Looking over the bow, it felt like looking over a cliff.”

His race now over, McGuckin was devastated. He updated Race Control but didn’t ask for assistance – he planned to wait out the storm and assess his options, including sailing to land with a jury (makeshift) rig, which could take two months.

However, 90 miles away, serious drama was unfolding. Tomy was injured and could not move. “It took my mind off my own situation: there was somebody far worse off,” says McGuckin. They were 1,900 miles from Australia, out of reach of helicopters or shipping lanes.

McGuckin’s engine would not work so he set up a jury rig with two small sails. The sea was still rough and his speed was only around two knots, which he found frustrating.

In the meantime, an international rescue was under way. French fisheries patrol vessel Osiris and Australian warship HMAS Ballarat were on the way, and the Indian authorities despatched a military plane, a stealth frigate and a tanker, but they would take days to arrive.

Tomy was trapped in his bunk and could not eat, drink or reach his satellite phone. McGuckin battled for three days to reach him, hand-steering as the self-steering was lost with the mast. He didn’t sleep more than 20 minutes. “I was really worried. If I was first on the scene, there was a chance I would not be able to do anything,” he says.

“The seas were really nasty. With no engine, I would have one shot to get onto his boat. I was running everything in my head, working out potential methods of getting onto his boat, from jumping over to trying to get over in a life raft. I didn’t know what condition he was in, or I could find out his boat was going to sink in an hour.”

If the boats came into contact in the big seas, it could be catastrophic. On September 24, McGuckin heard the French vessel was on the scene. “That was the most relief I have ever felt.”

McGuckin then prepared to be evacuated onto Osiris. He says being rescued wasn’t a decision – with no mast, engine or self-steering, it would have been reckless to go on. Seeing Tomy was emotional. “He put me through a lot, and I told him that – in jest, obviously.”

The pair were delivered to Amsterdam Island and after two days McGuckin was collected by HMAS Ballarat and Tomy rescued by an Indian Navy ship. Ten days later McGuckin arrived in Perth, where his girlfriend Barbara was waiting.

He is hugely grateful to all his sponsors for their support, including Hanley Energy, which flew Barbara out to Australia. After two weeks of recovery, McGuckin returned home to a hero’s welcome on October 15.

The two yachts are still at sea – they were left afloat as they were near an International Marine Reserve, which worries McGuckin as the boat could be a danger to navigation. It’s too far from anywhere to be salvaged but could eventually drift closer to land.

He finds it hard that the race is still going on and he’s not still in it, but he’s grateful to be back safe – and these races always have a risk. Of the 18 starters, 10 have already retired, due to accidents or gear failure, and the race is only halfway through.

Sitting in the National Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire, McGuckin says the experience has not put him off boats. What about that round-the-world challenge? “I’ll have no doubt I’ll go round again at some point,” he says with a wry smile.

# Solid, safe and steady wins the estate race

The V60 might not be Car of the Year, but with its versatility, gorgeous looks and impressive environmental credentials, it is arguably every bit as good as the winner, writes *Graeme Lennox*

The Irish Motoring Writers’ Association last week voted the Volvo XC40 as its Irish Car of the Year for 2019.

My money was on BMW’s brilliant M5, or the not-quite-so-thrilling-but-more-affordable Honda Civic Type R. However, lusty sports cars aren’t exactly flavour of the month right now. The XC40 is a solid choice and, more importantly, comes without any negative connotations. The compact SUV, also 2018 European Car of the Year, excels without being exceptional but, this week, I’ve driven a Volvo that looks better and is also kinder to the planet.

The V60 Estate may not have the same clout as the XC40 – or indeed its larger V90 stablemate – but it’s a terrific family load-lugger with versatility and gorgeous looks.

First released in 2011 and given a facelift in 2014, the second-generation V60 looks like a car that was made

by people who were riding a wave of self-confidence. Volvo has experienced extraordinary success under the stewardship of chief executive Hakan Samuelsson and Chinese owners Geely. The Scandinavian firm reported its highest profit for a six-month period in the first half of this year.

The soft curves of the old model have been replaced by hard lines and chiselled features, and nearly every facet of the car has been improved in one way or another. The ordinary-looking headlamps now come with a godlike Thor’s hammer design. The flaccid grille is gone and replaced by a concave piece of artwork that’s struck

through with a bigger, bolder Volvo badge. The rear roofline no longer tapers off with a whimper but has a robust finish that adds drama to the tail.

In terms of design, the Swedish estate has shed its antique dealer look and these days is a bit more BoConcept

than Ikea. Our test car came with 19in alloys that almost filled the giant wheelarches. The maroon-brown leather interior (a look that simply would not work in other cars) was fantastic and the finish in the cabin was second to none.

I took my train-obsessed four-year-old to a model railway exhibition at the excellent Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in Holywood, Co Down, at the weekend. Normally, the two-hour journey becomes a drag as you transition over the border and the sat nav’s rapidly declining kilometres-to-destination gauge turns into a miles-to-destination sludgest. We were about as comfortable as we could get.

His nibs was fast asleep within half an hour of setting off, while I enjoyed a rare



escape from the relentless preschool Spotify playlists, and kicked back in one of the most luxurious and comfortable seats in the business.

Volvos have always been renowned for their old-world charms and quirks, but latest-generation models strike a perfect balance between tradition and innovation. One of the firm’s most recent ventures is a partnership with chip maker Nvidia to provide in-car artificial intelligence for self-driving cars. We won’t see the first fruits of this digital alliance until at least 2020, but the V60 already has a smart autopilot system at its heart.

In keeping with Volvo’s pledge to eliminate serious injuries and fatalities involving its cars by 2020, the V60 is one of the safest cars on the road. Industry safety watchdog Euro NCAP has yet to release results of V60 crash-tests, but you can see a video of its Pilot Assist system in action online.

When approaching a stationary inflatable car at 80kph, it comes to a standstill. Approaching the same hazard at 130kph, on-board sensors help steer the car out of harm’s way. It’s a remarkable piece of footage that’s worthy of a big-screen performance. And,



There’s nothing new about the V60 Estate’s tablet-style screen – but it looks great

if you are dubious about the ability of autonomous cars to make the roads safer, I’d urge you to watch it.

Pilot Assist is one of the better semi-autonomous driving aids out there. On well-marked roads it takes care of accelerating, braking and steering duties, allowing you to relax and soak up the effortlessly cool ambience of your surrounds. There’s a

tendency for adaptive cruise-control systems to encourage complacency, but I wouldn’t say I switched off while using it. Rather, it acts as a handy failsafe in case someone changes lanes unexpectedly.

If the latest V60 doesn’t get five stars for safety I’ll eat my faux-leather driving gloves – the last one scored 94% for adult-occupant safety and was a class leader in that regard.

Features such as City Safety, which automatically brakes the car if vehicle, pedestrian, cyclist or large animal is detected, make the difference.

Between the unbridled comfort, the feeling of security and the general hush inside the cabin, the stresses of everyday motoring tend to pass you by. There’s nothing new about the tablet-style screen, but anyone who has

## VOLVO V60 D4 INSCRIPTION

Price **€55,995** (including €8,645 of options)

Engine **1997cc**  
4 cylinder turbo diesel

Performance 0 to 100kph in **7.9 secs**

Top speed **220kph**

Fuel **4.7 litres** per 100km

CO2 **126g** per km

Road tax Band B2 (€270 a year)

Rating **★★★★☆**

Verdict Rear of the year

On sale Out now

choice of two 4-cylinder turbodiesels – the 148bhp D3 and 187bhp D4 driven here. The D4 is the quicker of the two. Meanwhile, fuel consumption and emission levels are similar to that of the D3. Even on 18in wheels the V60 handled well. It’s not as sharp as a BMW 3-series Touring, but the light steering makes town driving effortless.

Three trim levels are available, starting with the Momentum (from €40,750). Standard equipment includes 17in wheels, a 9in touchscreen and 12.3in TFT driver information display, keyless start, cruise control, hill start assist, LED headlights, rear parking sensors, two-zone climate control and cloth trim.

Stepping up to the sporty R-Design (from €46,434) adds 18in wheels, leather sports seats, a heated steering wheel and sports chassis. Meanwhile, comfort-oriented Inscription models (from €46,489) add ambient lighting, memory seats, a chrome grille and window surrounds, and all-round parking sensors.

The V60 might not have been crowned Car of the Year, but it’s further proof that estates are some of the best cars on our roads right now.

driven a Volvo will tell you it looks great. Swiping through menu screens and zooming satellite navigation maps sounds easy on paper, but in reality it can be a bit of a faff – and the screen had trouble registering inputs from my sausage fingers. At least it’s compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

The V60 shares its platform with the XC60 SUV and four of

the 90 range of Volvo flagships. And because the wheelbase has been extended by 10cm, there’s room inside for five adults and a 529-litre boot with electronically operated tailgate as standard.

Right now, the V60 is available with just two diesel engines, but I’d expect petrol and plug-in hybrid variants to join the range at some point. For now, buyers are left with a