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# Sunday



**Reporting over the waves**

The intrepid media on board the Volvo Ocean Race **Page 27**

InGear



BRIAN CARLIN

# Bad commute? Yes, we hit a reef and sank

Carlin, from Kerry, is head of the nine-month Volvo Ocean Race team of onboard reporters

As the second leg of the Volvo Ocean Race sets sail today, *Yvonne Gordon* finds out what life is like for one of the race's daredevil onboard reporters

It's no dull day at the office for Brian Carlin, in what is billed as sport's journalism's toughest job. He is reporting from a Volvo ocean racing yacht. "You're nice and comfortable and suddenly someone shouts down 'tacking' or 'gybing' to the off watch," he says. "Half the crew could be asleep. You have to grab all your equipment and cameras – including your seat – take your sleeping bag and

your 25kg pelican case, and move it all to the other side of the boat. You get there and think, 'great, this is super', you start to work, you do five minutes of editing and it all happens again."

We're below deck in a Volvo Ocean 65 racing boat and Carlin is telling me about life during the 46,000 nautical mile race around the planet. As well as the crews that sign up for the nine-month race – one of the world's longest and

toughest professional sporting events – each boat has an onboard reporter (OBR), whose sole job is to record stories of life on the vessel.

The seven-boat race set off from Alicante last month and will be at sea for weeks at a time. The OBRs will give fans an insight into life in the race.

It sounds like a dream job, but it is gruelling – as well as spending weeks at sea, you have to eat freeze-dried food, sleep in short bursts, go

without showers and train in sea survival.

Conditions range from stormy, wet and freezing cold (the Southern Ocean), to hot, sweaty and no wind (the doldrums). Life below decks in a 65-ft carbon fibre tube is bumpy as waves slam into the boat. It is extremely noisy, so trying to work or sleep is a real challenge.

Although conditions are extreme, when an ad went up last year, 10,000 people

flooded the website and they got 160 applications. After trials, a shortlist of 30 was drawn up.

Carlin, from Tralee in Kerry, was an OBR with Team Vestas Wind in the 2014/5 race and is now leader of the OBR squad. His team didn't make it round the world in the last race – they crashed into a reef in the Indian Ocean at night in November 2014, and were out of the race for six months

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GADGETFIX  
THIS CUTE  
ROBOT DOG  
WON'T MAKE  
A MESS ON  
YOUR CARPET





Life on the ocean wave in sunny climes off Cape Verde

while the boat was rebuilt. As well as filming the aftermath of the crash, Brian documented the boat’s rebuild and the final two legs the following June.

This time, as OBR team leader, he is in charge of the nine other OBRs, as well as sourcing all the equipment.

“I was really happy to take on the challenge,” he says. “I think I was well positioned because I know how it operates. I’d experienced more than most people would in a normal race between crashing into a reef and then rebuilding the boat.”

We’re in the Volvo Ocean Race Boatyard in Lisbon, where the boats are being fitted out before they move to Alicante for the start, and Brian is showing me the equipment. We’ve had to climb up three ladders to get on to the deck (out of the water, it’s 7m off the ground). In the OBR station, a cramped space below deck, there is a small desk with space for a laptop and a monitor for the onboard cameras. The seat, which is on ropes and pulleys, is moved to the other side of the boat when it changes tack.

Each OBR will have a Canon 5D mk IV camera, a Sony A7Sii camera, four lenses (8-15mm, 24-105, 16-35mm and 70-200mm), a Canon XA 25 camcorder, a Garmin VIRB Ultra 30, Garmin 360 action cams and a Phantom 4 Pro Drone. They also have microphones, a tripod, eyepieces, memory cards, chargers, adaptors, spare batteries, a lens/sensor cleaning kit and a waterproof camera housing, plus a laptop (and a spare) and an iPad.

Outside communication is not allowed, except with race HQ, so phones are sealed away.

On deck, Brian shows me the fixed cameras on board. Wide-angle stern cameras capture the action from the boat at the back, hatch cameras record the action in the cockpit and there are spreader cameras, a bird’s eye camera and one on the bow. There are microphones at the

mast, helming stations, hatch and navigation desk.

Every day, the OBRs have to produce and send images and video. They can post on social media (although they cannot interact until the race leg is over), and they will also use drones, capturing aerial footage in places like the Southern Ocean, previously out of range for helicopters and support boats to film in.

Using the equipment at sea presents its own challenges, such as launching drones from boats that don’t have a fixed “home” point to return to. Other drone issues include losing signal and avoiding damage to sails, boat or crew.

Two fleet broadband domes at the back of the boat use Inmarsat satellites to transmit all the material to servers at race HQ in Alicante. Under these are two liferafts – Carlin’s crew had to abandon ship into the liferaft after the Indian Ocean crash. The onboard cameras record 24 hours a day, using infrared for night time, and everything is saved in a buffer. If there is an incident, the OBR presses a “crash button” which saves the last four minutes of footage.

When the race organisers had shortlisted applicants, Brian helped complete selection. “We looked at technical stuff, personality, ability to sail,” says Brian. “A couple of people said after a trial, ‘Maybe this isn’t for me’. Everybody thinks it’s an amazing job, but it’s not easy.”

The final squad of 10, with Carlin and two reserves, this year includes photographer Jen Edney, kitesurfing videographer Jeremie Lecaudey, adventurer and documentary maker James Blake and Tom Martienssen, a former soldier who has climbed Everest.

*The Volvo Ocean Race started on October 22. The first leg is now completed and Vestas 11th Hour Racing is in the lead. The second leg, from Lisbon to Cape Town, starts today. volvoceanrace.com*

# Ranelagh tractor with the wow factor

Plugging the gap between the Evoque and Range Rover Sport, the Velar combines cutting-edge luxury with pared-back looks. By *Graeme Lennox*

Having invented the premium sports utility vehicle, Land Rover can rightly feel aggrieved by the level of unwanted encroachment upon its turf.

SUVs are everywhere these days, but at least Land Rover can claim a heritage its rivals sorely lack. Velar was the badge that adorned early prototypes of the original 1970 Range Rover and now it has been adopted by the luxury marque’s fourth model.

Designed to bridge the gap between the Evoque and Range Rover Sport, the mid-sized SUV instantly beats both hands down when it comes to the wow factor. Rather than playing off Range Rover’s lord of the manor countenance, it has the sort of pared-down look that will appeal to young, tech-savvy customers.

The Velar looks like a top-end gadget that just happens to have wheels and go like stink down a motorway. It lacks the compromises of the fashion-conscious Evoque but majors in practicality and gadgets. Headline features – and there are plenty – range from motorised door handles and state-of-the-art infotainment systems, to aluminium powertrains and

seats made from recycled plastic bottles. I suspect focus groups were held almost exclusively in Silicon Valley.

The Velar can be equipped with 22in wheels, has a clamshell bonnet and is certain to eventually be modded in candy floss pink for a Premier League footballer but, as an ultra-capable family runaround or office on wheels, it has genuine depth.

Prices here start from €62,240 but you could end up paying €150,630 (excluding options) depending on your choice of engine and finish. That’s quite the price differential. But, regardless of which end of the pay scale you sit at, the Velar looks fantastic.

The chunky grille and gently sloping roof give it a rugged look, but this is a car that will appeal to both sexes. Land Rover has ditched the upright styling and distinguished itself from the rest of the range with the narrowest set of LED headlights it has ever made.

There’s a rear roof spoiler to improve aerodynamics, and fancy door handles that sit flush against the body until you approach and retract when the car is locked or exceeds 8kph.

The minimalist interior feels even more skewed towards the tech elite with the button

count slashed and the majority of controls hidden behind toughened-glass touchscreens. Visually it’s stunning and feels like wafting into a home-of-the future showroom.

Fire up the ignition and the upper part of the 10in dual screen display swivels downwards to meet the driver’s gaze while a silver rotary gear selector glides out of the centre console as if you’re about to launch a drone strike on your bitterest business rival. My inner techie was doing cartwheels when I first fired up the system and started delving through menus that are hidden from sight until the point you need them. The upper screen tilts through 30 degrees and is divided into three panels for navigation, media and phone. Side panels provide shortcuts to news and weather while the lower screen is for climate control and Land Rover’s Terrain Response off-road suite.

There are just three physical buttons with most other functions controlled by your



NICK DIMBLEBY

fingertips. The clean interface is wonderful but some controls work better than others and I noticed some input lag. Also, using a touchscreen requires the driver to take their eyes off the road, which is far from ideal. The steering wheel-mounted thumbsticks are a good idea in principle but, as they combine physical and touchscreen functionality, the uninitiated will make a terrible hash of things at first.

A large centre console separates front-seat occupants. There’s a smattering of storage spaces and a split front armrest with four litres of storage space. The cooled glovebox provides another 7.5 litres of storage. Row-one occupants have access to two USB ports and three 12V power sockets while door bins accommodate 750ml drinks bottles.

With a wheelbase measuring 2,874mm, the Velar sits smack bang between the Evoque (2,660mm) and Range Rover Sport (2,923mm). Up front there’s plenty of head and shoulder room while in the back there’s decent shoulder room. That sloping roof means six-footers might feel the pinch, however.

Our test car’s panoramic sunroof flooded the cabin with



Touchscreen controls ensure a clean interface that will appeal to tech-savvy customers

light but shallow windows mean it could be a bit dark and dingy in the back without one. In general, build quality was rock-solid but materials become cheaper the further down you go. The door bins were particularly plasticky for this sort of money.

One area where the Velar excels is boot space. The 673-litre luggage compartment is perfect for family trips or indulging weekend hobbies. It

comes with a flat load lip and (in all but the entry-level model) an automated tailgate. Models with air suspension (standard with V6 engines) have a button that lets owners lower ride height for lifting heavy items. Buyers who go for the spare wheel lose their underfloor storage space, but the 40/20/40 split seats are ideal for loading longer items while still carrying passengers.

Four trim levels are

available here – entry-level Standard, S, SE and range-topping HSE.

Standard kit includes 18in wheels, manual tailgate, rain-sensing wipers, heated door mirrors, a 5in TFT display, rear-parking sensors plus voice and cruise control. Upgrading to S (from €70,450) adds 19in wheels, daytime running lights, a powered tailgate, heated door mirrors with puddle lights, 10-way memory

RANGE ROVER VELAR 2.0 D 240PS 4WD SE	
Price	€82,515
Engine	1,999cc 4 cylinder turbodiesel
Performance	0 to 100kph in 7.3 secs
Top speed	217kph
Fuel	5.8 litres per100km
CO2	154g per km
Road tax	Band C (€390 a year)
Rating	★★★★☆
Verdict	Stellar Velar
On sale	Out now

driver seats, sat nav and a rear-view camera. SE models (from €77,040) add 20in wheels, adaptive front lights, a 825-watt sound system, virtual instruments and a 360-degree parking camera system. HSE models (from €88,340) get perforated leather seats with massage function, 21in wheels and adaptive cruise control. Meanwhile, Land Rover Ireland has R-Dynamic upgrades (from €4,435) that

add a distinctive bumper with copper accents plus metal tread plates, pedals and gear shift paddles.

The engine line-up consists of three diesels and a couple of petrol models with emissions ranging from 142g/km CO<sub>2</sub> to 214g/km. The big seller here is likely to be Jaguar Land Rover group’s aluminium Ingenium engine. The two-litre power unit is available in two guises – 178bhp and 237bhp. There’s

also two-litre V6 diesel with 296bhp. The entry-level petrol unit is a two-litre with 247bhp and 173g/km emissions while the flagship three-litre V6 petrol has 375bhp. All models come with four-wheel drive and use Land Rover’s silky ZF eight-speed automatic transmission.

Our 237bhp, two-litre diesel had more than enough poke for everyday driving, although it sounded like it was working hard under heavy acceleration. Performance-wise, the Velar felt ponderous at times. Steering was light but lacked feedback. The adaptive suspension (standard on all models) ironed out bumps commendably but will be a little soft for some people’s liking. The Velar has a ground clearance of 213mm and comes with a suite of all-terrain functions. Safety equipment includes autonomous emergency braking with pedestrian detection and driver-awareness monitoring.

While underwhelmed by the driving experience and baffled by the infotainment system, I came away convinced that the Velar is the most handsome car to wear the Range Rover badge. Land Rover may not have exclusive rights on SUVs but it makes the best-looking one on the road.