



It's a blustery June Sunday morning in Dun Laoghaire as Damian Foxall makes preparations on board the racing yacht Oman Air-Musandam, a MOD70 — a 70ft trimaran made by the Swiss company Multi One Design. A day's racing has just been cancelled because of strong winds and it's the second setback to the week-end's schedule.

The day before, Oman Air was supposed to compete in three inshore races, but, just minutes into the first, Spindrift, a fellow competing yacht, capsized spectacularly and all racing came to a stop.

The incident resulted in two of the Spindrift's eight crew being airlifted to hospital and came as a shock to the competitors, organisers and hundreds of on-lookers. It was, Foxall says, "a little reality check for everyone".

A day later and it's back to business as usual or, at least, it would be if the weather permitted. Like a crash in Formula 1, a capsized, while rare, is still one of the dangers of trimaran racing, but Foxall says the mood on his boat remains positive.

"We've seen it before," he says. Indeed, having competed in nine round-the-world races, there is little that the 43-year-old from Derrynane, in Co Kerry, hasn't seen.

MOD70s are designed for offshore, distance racing and Oman Air-Musandam was entered in the Routes des Princes, a European multi-hull sailing event that started in Valencia, in Spain, on June 5, before moving to Dun Laoghaire.

The day after we speak, Foxall and his crew were due to set off for the Dublin-Plymouth stage of the event, a leg they would go on to win.

Before he left, he explained the preparation involved. On deck, a big white bag with three sleeping bags is being delivered. It is just back from being laundered. Foxall laughs when I ask why there are only three bags for six crew, telling me that one is actually a spare — "just in case".

The boat has only two bunks and, while they are racing, there are always four crew on deck and two on standby, which is when the latter get to sleep. Watches are two hours on and four hours off. This is definitely not the luxurious lifestyle that some people may associate with being an ocean-racing sailor.

Keeping the weight of everything on board to a minimum is vital and that includes eating freeze-dried food. The living quarters in the narrow central hull of the boat, are cramped anyway so there's no space for cooking.

"It's very easy to forget to look after yourself as the boat comes first. You get sleep, but you can forget to drink water and eat, so you have to remind yourself to look after yourself and also keep an eye on your buddies. After two days,

**The capsizing of Spindrift, which won the Lisbon to Dun Laoghaire leg of the La Route des Princes, shocked onlookers and competitors**

any neglect can have an impact on performance."

The Kerryman joined the Oman Air-Musandam team in January as sail trimmer and helmsman. Much of 2011 and 2012 was spent with the winning crew, Groupama, in the 40,000-nautical-mile, nine-month-long Volvo Ocean Race, which began in Alicante, in Spain, and ended in Galway.

Foxall took part in the same race on

## The real backpackers' guide

If you are thinking of giving wild camping a go, it can be a good idea to try it out while still remaining close to civilisation. This means you can learn through experience what you do and don't need, without risks.

When you camp in more remote areas, it's important to ensure you always tell somebody where you are

going and don't rely on having a phone signal. Carrying a heavy bag over rough ground is very testing and it is also vital to keep the weight of your pack to a minimum.

The best way to learn the skills necessary to walk independently in the Irish hills is by taking a mountain skills course, which are run by

providers all over the country.

These are designed as an introduction to hill walking and cover topics such as using a map and compass, navigation, route planning, emergency procedures, equipment and scrambling. To learn more check out Mountaineering Ireland's website, mountaineering.ie.

Boats today are capable of ever greater speeds and the crew are constantly challenged, but sailing them, according to Irishman Damian Foxall, is like living a childhood dream. **By Yvonne Gordon**

# FASTER THAN THE WIND

ACTIVE



The Oman Air trimaran takes part in the Route des Princes; below, Foxall reckons he has spent a third of the past two years at sea

taking part in the two-handed Transat Jacques Vabre race which starts in Le Havre, in France, on November 3. It covers 5,450 nautical miles to Itajaí, in Brazil. Their season with a full crew of six ended in August and Foxall and Gavignet are now training intensively.

The Irishman describes taking part in such events as the pinnacle of his sport. "We're living our childhood dream, except that when we were children we never knew these things existed," he says. The race is another big opportunity but it's not his first attempt. "I've done it twice before. The first time we finished third and the second time we capsized, so it's unfinished business for me," he says.

The capsized was during the 2005 Transat Jacques Vabre, when Foncia, Foxall's 60ft boat, was knocked over in gale-force winds. The yachtsman ended up in hospital with a dislocated shoulder. Both he and the French skipper, Armel Le Cléac'h, were lucky to survive the incident.

"The conditions were very difficult," he says. "We had a wind speed of 40 to 45 knots in the Bay of Biscay and a gust pushed us over. There were just two of us and it's a lot of boat to be handling."

Another challenge on Oman Air's

**'IT'S EASY TO FORGET TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF. THE BOAT COMES FIRST. YOU CAN FORGET TO SLEEP, DRINK AND EAT'**

must-do list is an attempt at the round-Ireland speed record, which stands at 44 hours. Foxall reckons it would be a good training exercise for the Jacques Vabre race and may try it soon.

"Coastal racing is more difficult and demanding than offshore. It's good for training as it highlights strengths and weaknesses," he says.

Foxall is modest about his success, attributing it to "being in the right place at the right time", as well as growing up in an unrestricted environment in Co Kerry. He says he works hard and has a good attitude when it comes to the risks involved.

Worries about capsizing never put him off. "It's not about being afraid. It's more a case of understanding where the limits are and staying within them," he says. "You don't get involved without knowing the risks."

"The sport is becoming like motor racing. On these boats in certain conditions we can probably go twice the wind speed."

In his book, Ocean Fever, co-authored with the sports journalist David Brannigan and published in 2011, Foxall says that under certain conditions, racing boats can actually be sailed faster than the crew can physically control them.

Since then, the speed record has been set at 65.45 knots. In May, safety measures for the high-speed catamarans in this year's America's Cup were revised, after Andrew Simpson, a former British Olympic sailor, was killed during a training session on the 72ft catamaran Artemis Racing.

"Boats can go faster now. We have to take that into account. It's not going to stop. We are going to be going faster and faster," says Foxall.

"Our kids, if they are racing offshore, will be faster again. They'll be using things we haven't even imagined. It will push technology and human beings to the limit."



Copeland says adventure racing was a 'shock to the system' at first

## GET SET FOR AN EPIC ADVENTURE

Endurance ace Avril Copeland is ready to race in Killarney next month, and you can too

Anyone seeking inspiration ahead of next month's Killarney Adventure Race need look no further than Avril Copeland, writes Graeme Lennox.

The 35-year-old from Ballinteer in Dublin started adventure racing 13 years ago and has competed in some of the world's toughest endurance events.

The daughter of renowned tailor and businessman Louis, she moved to Nashville in Tennessee in 2000 to follow her passion for country music, but also ended up being introduced to the exciting world of expedition racing.

"One Christmas I was watching an expedition race on television when I thought, 'what an amazing sport'. I immediately emailed one of the teams to ask how to get involved, and I did a one-week introductory course," she says.

Multiday adventure races combine the core disciplines of kayaking, trekking, navigating and mountain biking. Mixed teams cover upwards of 600km and activities often include horse riding, abseiling and rock climbing.

Sports-mad Copeland, who has represented Leinster and Ireland at hockey, admits racing was a "shock to the system", but her persistence paid off and she went on to compete in several world championships.

Since returning to Ireland in 2007 and becoming a chartered physiotherapist, she has been a regular on the Irish one-day and multiday adventure racing circuit.

Last year she became an ambassador for the Killarney Adventure Race, but this will be her first attempt at the 69km challenge, which takes place on October 5.

"I competed in the expedition racing world championships in France the week before last year's race so couldn't recover in time," she says. "I'm struggling with a knee injury right now but have roped so many people in, I will have to take part somehow."

The event is held among stunning Co Kerry scenery and competitors start in the foothills of the Macgillycuddy's Reeks before mountain running, cycling and kayaking their way

around 69km, 59km or 27km courses. "The scenery around Killarney is extraordinary," says Copeland.

"Adventure racing is the kind of sport where people will go out of their way for each other. I've made a lot of friends through it and, when you push yourself to your limits, it's amazing what it does for your confidence in other areas of life."

So what advice does she have for those who are thinking about taking part? "Just sign up and do it," she says. "Even if you are struggling to reach full fitness or have never tried anything like this before, you still won't regret it. It's all about getting round at a pace that suits you. You don't have to go flat out. What matters is that you finish."

Those entering the race can follow Copeland's online training plans (found at killarneyadventureace.ie), and Copeland recommends taking a consistent, progressive approach to training.

Even experienced athletes have off days when they would rather not lace up their runners, but she has a handy trick for getting out the front door.

"It's called the 10-minute rule," she says. "Tell yourself you are going to go for 10 minutes and see how you get on. After 10 minutes, if you are still feeling lousy then you're free to stop, but that very rarely happens."

On race day, Copeland recommends not bringing too much gear. "If you're going to be walking on the hill sections, it might be an idea to take a rain jacket. You also need the items on the mandatory gear list such as a first-aid kit. But you should avoid taking things you won't need."

"Choose your food carefully. Use protein and carbohydrate bars or energy gels, but don't eat or drink something you haven't tried before. If you're out for a long time then an old-fashioned sandwich is good, too."

✚ The Helly Hansen Killarney Adventure Race takes place on October 5. The Sunday Times is media partner for the event and is running a number of competitions for readers. In the latest we are giving away €2,000 worth of Helly Hansen gear. See back page for details. killarneyadventure-race.ie