

SUNDAY

LIFE

HOME

FOOD

INGEAR

NO BOYS, JUST BUOYS

Yvonne Gordon joins
the female-only team
in this year's Volvo
Ocean Race | p6



MI CASA ES
SU CASA

A peek inside the homes taking
part in this year's Open House | p9

DESIGN FLOORS

Dara Flynn on the
rugs that will never
go out of fashion | p14

HUNGER FOR
KNOWLEDGE

Young people get a crash
course in catering | p23

Sisterhood of the high seas

Next month's Volvo Ocean Race features the first all-female crew in more than a decade. The women will tackle eight months of wild weather and towering waves as they aim to beat the buoys at their own game.

Yvonne Gordon gets on board

It's a beautiful morning in Lanzarote and I'm off sailing with the girls. It might sound like a relaxing day out, but it's anything but.

Already my companions and I have endured a gruelling 7am gym session and now we're on a 65ft-long racing yacht, capable of moving so fast that the team have to wear masks and snorkels to cope with extreme conditions.

When I say girls, I don't really mean girls, either. My hostesses are an 11-strong international squad of experienced competitive sailors who have come together as a female-only crew to take part in the upcoming Volvo Ocean Race. Team SCA — named after their sponsor, a Swedish consumer goods and paper manufacturer — will be up against six other boats, all crewed by men, when the event starts in Alicante on October 4 and travels 38,739 nautical miles to end in Gothenburg next June.

As one of the world's toughest offshore races, it is a gruelling endurance challenge, which is why my invitation to tag along came with one proviso: Team SCA would be training as normal and I would have to shape up or ship out.

The day's sailing starts in Puerto Calero and as we move out to open sea, the atmosphere on board turns rather workwomanlike. Carolijn Brouwer, the boat's tactician, gives the signal to hoist the mainsail and headsail up the 100ft mast and high-speed grinding on the pedestal winches follows. We are sailing in 15 to 20 knot winds and the boat is matching this speed.

I am an experienced sailor, so Brouwer asks if I want to take the helm. I jump at the chance only to discover that keeping on course involves a constant battle with raging gusts and high waves. All around me the crew work at pace, continually making adjustments to the sails in a bid to find every bit of available speed.



Everyone is giving 100%, so you know you can go off-watch trusting the others to keep pushing the boat to the maximum

I am in good hands. Brouwer, a 41-year old Dutchwoman, is an accomplished multihull sailor who has competed in three Olympics. She won the ISAF World Sailor of the Year Awards in 1998 and was part of the crew on Amer Sports Too, an all-female team that competed in the 2001/2002 Volvo Ocean Race.

In the pit area is Britain's Dee Caffari. A well-known offshore sailor, she was the first woman to have sailed solo around the world in both directions. Fellow Brit Sam Davies, from Portsmouth, is Team SCA skipper. She

finished fourth in the 2008/2009 Vendée Globe, a round-the-world, single-handed race. The mix of nationalities also includes Swiss sisters Elodie and Justine Mettraux, Australians Sophie Ciszek and Liz Wardley, and American Sara Hastreiter.

They all work well together and will need to. The Volvo Ocean Race lasts eight months and visits 11 countries, with the crews having to endure wild weather conditions and extreme hot and cold temperatures during lengthy spells at sea. They will tackle the Roaring Forties — strong westerly winds found in the southern hemisphere — and must cope with the big seas of the Southern Ocean. And that's just half the battle.

The rest involves a lack of sleep, eating freeze-dried food, and burning up to 6,500 calories a day each. Sailing continuously for up to three weeks at a time tests everything from physical strength and stamina to psychological endurance. The boats can break and sink, injuries occur regularly, and crew have even died during the race in the past. Sailing at full speed is akin to driving a convertible through a car wash — hence the need for snorkels and masks. Missing family and friends can also be

tough, particularly on team members with children, but they wouldn't want to be anywhere else. "I love all of it," says Caffari. "I get to sail and work in the gym every day. The more land training we do, the more physically tired we are when sailing, but the theory is that we train hard and race easy."

Caffari went from solo sailing to being part of a team, but says she enjoys the intensity of racing with others.

"I was so used to being responsible for and needing to know everything, it took me a while to realise that actually, I only need to focus on my job," she says. "It's nice because you know that everyone else is giving 100%, so you can go off-watch trusting the others to keep pushing the boat to the maximum."

Only four all-female teams have competed in the Volvo Ocean Race — formerly the Whitbread Round the World Race — since it began in 1973, and the last was Amer Sports Too 13 years ago. This is the first time, however, that a female team has had the same financial backing as the male ones, thanks to SCA.

The firm makes household brands such as Bodyform feminine hygiene products, Plenty kitchen towels and Velvet toilet tissue. With some 44,000

Waiting for no man

The team are training off Puerto Calero in Lanzarote, top and inset left (with Gordon at the helm), to build up their stamina for the gruelling endurance challenge



employees worldwide, including about 40 in Dublin, SCA can provide the resources required to build a high-performance team, including racing coaches and shore crew. In return, the company gets to partner a high-profile squad taking part in a leading televised sporting event. Partnering with an all-female boat is ideal for the firm as about 80% of its products are bought by women. "Our products, such as Bodyform, allow ordinary women to do extraordinary things," says Ben Heppenstall, SCA's communications manager. "The girls are taking the SCA message worldwide."

Knut Frostad, chief executive of the Volvo Ocean Race, is delighted to welcome the all-female team: "The lack of women in the last few editions of the race has meant we haven't been representing half the population of the human race," he says.

Preparing for the event involves more than just sailing, however. Caffari talks me through the logistics and planning as we walk around base camp in Puerto Calero — a boatyard full of shipping containers. Arranging the supplies takes place months in advance. "We have to think about what we need at

every stopover," she says. "We are packing bags for that now and ordering the food. We have to work out which legs are hot legs and which ones are cold. We have vacuum packed a lot of toilet roll."

Caffari is optimistic about the race. "There's no reason why we can't put in good performances and be competitive," she says. "It's about making the least mistakes. There's so much beyond your control that you have to be flexible. Anything can happen at any time, so you have to maximise gains when you get them."

Brouwer, who has a three-year-old son, Kyle, says she relies on a supportive crew and family. "For me the most important thing is that I can leave the dock, go out to sea and be comfortable with the fact that I am leaving my son behind. I know who I am leaving him with and that he is going to get all the love that he needs," she says.

"I try to focus on the positive side of things. I'm not thinking about leaving the dock; I'm thinking about arriving at the next stop and seeing my little man there waving. Being reunited with your family is a really good part of racing."

The Volvo Ocean 65 is a one-design yacht, which means that each boat is

identical and has the same equipment and design. The only difference is that race rules allow the female team to have 11 crew members, while the male teams have eight.

Five of the seven Volvo 65 teams went bow to bow for the first time during last month's Sevenstar Round Britain and Ireland race, which started in the tail end of Hurricane Bertha, providing tough conditions and big seas for the crews. Team Abu Dhabi, skippered by Ian Walker and with Irish sailor Justin Slattery on board (*see panel*) finished in four days, 21 hours, breaking the monohull speed record by more than a day.

Team SCA finished in less than five days, breaking the women's monohull record. Despite a good race start, they took a costly easterly route up the

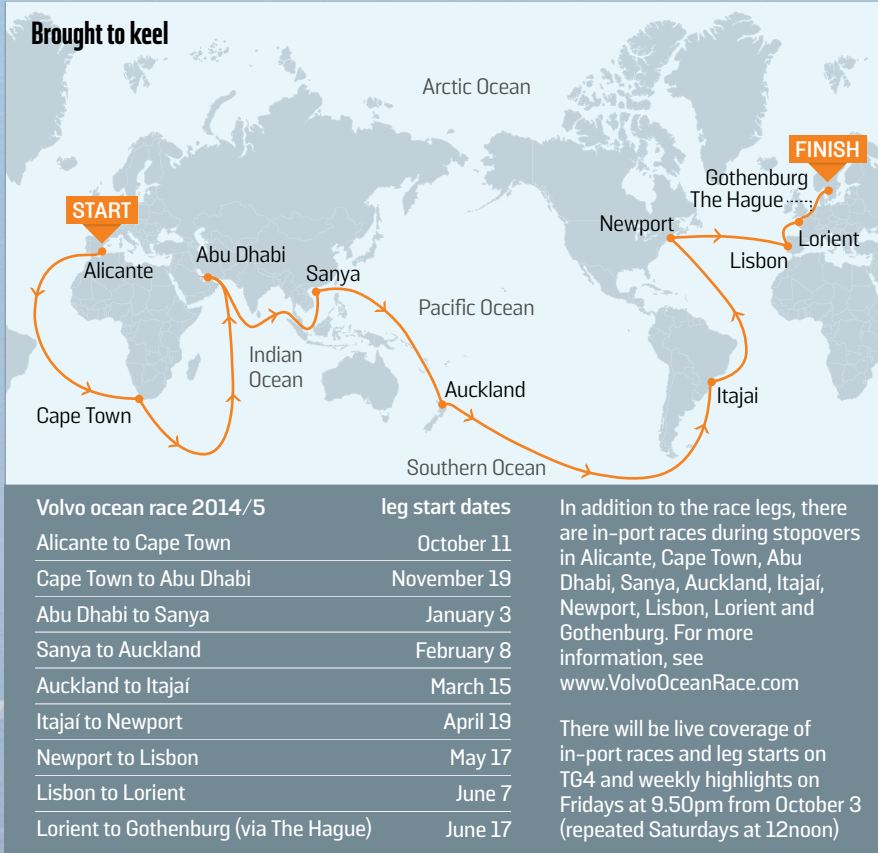
All hands on deck
The 11-woman Team SCA hoists sail and demonstrates why some conditions require the use of masks and snorkels, above left; the journey, above, begins in Alicante and ends in Gothenburg

English coast and fell behind. They then clawed their way back to finish just 10 minutes behind Team Alvimedica.

"The fact that we caught up was a huge achievement for us," says Hastreiter. "We got lucky and the girls also made some good navigational decisions. We were right there with them and that is really encouraging."

At 7am, in the gym, the morning after our on-the-water training in Lanzarote, the team's fitness coach, Santiago Casanova, watches as they go through their strengthening routines. I ask him what he thought when he heard that the male teams were training in the gym twice a day, thinking he might be worried. "They might be trying to catch up with us," he says.

teamsca.com



Rick Tomlinson