

Alexia Barrier

Inspiring local kids to take up the sails

By KIMBERLEY MANNION

Not many people can say they have circumnavigated the world, but 41-year-old Nicoise, Alexia Barrier, did it solo, non-stop and without assistance, completing the Vendée Globe in 111 days and 17 hours. Now she is using her achievement to inspire local children and give back to the community. RI speaks with the accomplished sailor.

RI: How did you begin sailing and realise you had a talent for it?

AB: I was born in Paris, and at the age of three, my family moved to Nice. We bought a little sailing boat and went sailing from Antibes - this is how I started, going out on trips with my parents and little brother. It was always an adventure for me and they are really nice childhood memories. I tried various sports growing up, but after competing in a sailing competition at the age of 15 I realised I was quite talented, so I continued trying to become the best I could at that. I actually watched the first Vendée Globe on TV when I was 12, and I told myself that I would do it one day - so it's both my professional career and a childhood dream!

What is the training regime like leading up to the Vendée Globe?

Before the Vendée Globe I had completed 17 transatlantic races, and had been part of the competitive circuit since I was 15. Over the years I have trained and learned from many instructors, first in Antibes, then I also attended sailing schools in Brittany and La Grande-Motte. The Vendée Globe requires specific preparation and hard work: along-



Alexia Barrier alone on her sailboat during the Vendée Globe, 2021 © Air Vide et Eau Lou-Kevin

side the physical preparation, I worked with a nutritionist and there is also the mental preparation to manage the stress and fear.

What was the hardest part of the course?

I had the oldest and slowest boat in the race. I am someone who always wants to win, but because of this I knew it would be impossible, so I learned to be patient. There were also hard moments because of the weather, as there were a lot of storms and difficult conditions. I was always happy to be in the race, even if it was difficult sometimes.

How did it feel to cross the finish line?

Pride and happiness! Really proud to have sailed around the whole world on my own - only the 10th woman to have done so. Not only happy for myself, but for the team who have worked really hard with me over the years, I couldn't have done it without them. Being reunited with my friends and family was also a really happy moment.

Describe the Vendée Globe in three words.

Adventure, extreme and wild.

You visited a school in Biot, and plan to tour schools across France. Why is this important to you?

Firstly, we have pedagogical kits available for free online in four different languages - they can follow the Vendée Globe race which helps them learn geography through the

map reading aspect, in a fun way. Thousands of kids across France have followed it, and it gives them a sense of adventure and inspires them. However, it is also important to meet them in real life, to show them that this is not a film or reality TV show, I am a real person. Even if today we don't have a choice due to Covid, it's important not to forget the importance of in-person conversation, particularly with children, so I will continue my tour around French schools when restrictions allow. It's much better speaking face-to-face than on social media. I love to see the sparkle in their eye when they ask me questions, and being able to inspire them to achieve their dreams is an amazing gift!

What are the opportunities to learn sailing on the Riviera?

The Côte d'Azur has sailing schools for all ages and all tastes - it's not just about individual competition like I have done. There are opportunities for those who like competition and those who just want to sail for leisure. You can do anything you want here!

What is your advice to the young people you meet on school visits?

Nothing is impossible. Believe in yourself. Don't listen to negative comments. With a lot of work, we can do anything we want in life.

What are your ambitions for the future?

To do another Vendée Globe, this time with a faster boat! ▀