

'HOW I BUILD MY BODY'

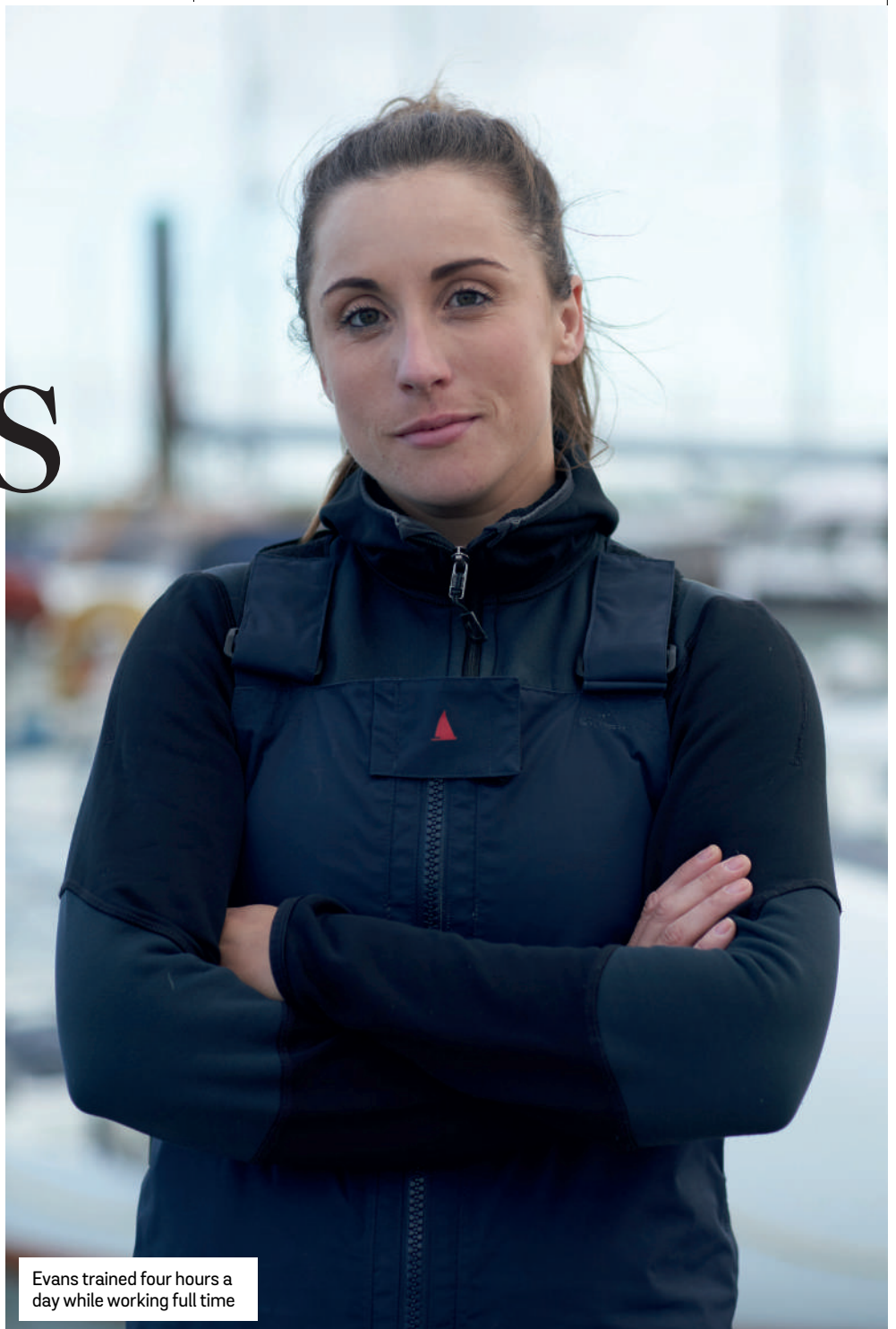
VICTORIA EVANS

MEET THE ELITE

Sports lawyer Evans rowed 2,559 nautical miles across the Atlantic Ocean between February 11 and March 24, 2022, to set a new world record for the fastest female solo row in 40 days and 19 hours, beating the previous record by nine days and seven hours. She took on the challenge to prove women's capabilities and raise funds for Women in Sport (womeninsport.org), a charity that challenges gender inequalities in sport and encourages young girls to be active.

CARDIO

'My focus was on building endurance. I clocked up 400 hours of training on the water in my boat over a two-and-a-half-year period before starting my crossing, as well as rowing at a club for a year from 2018 to learn the basics because I'd never rowed before. I also worked with a coach to become injury-proof. I knew I couldn't control the weather, but I could control setting off knowing I couldn't have done any more physical preparation. My standard training routine took about four hours a day, outside of my full-time working hours. A rough example would involve a 60-minute row and an upper body and core workout in the morning at the gym, and then back to the gym for a 15-minute row and a legs workout in the afternoon. Or I'd do one session a day with a 75-minute row, some skipping and a legs workout. Rowing uses around 86 per cent of your muscles, so we had to work the entire body to cover all the bases. But four hours of exercise a day



Evans trained four hours a day while working full time

was nothing in comparison to rowing 14-16 hours a day on the crossing, and nothing can prepare you for 28 knots of wind for a week solid.'

STRENGTH

'Although my strength training took a whole-body approach, we kept in mind the fact I'd be rowing on an unsteady boat. Therefore, I worked on specific muscles groups such as the core, including the obliques, and the posterior chain (my lower back, glutes and hamstrings), because rowing is all

about the legs and the push through the glutes. Many of my core workouts were done on a gym ball because it was unsteady, and I'd carry weight plates around to work on my grip strength because your hands go through a lot with the oars.'

NUTRITION

'My coach and I came up with a diet plan for which I ate certain types of food to help shift my metabolism into an efficient work pattern, and we also looked at what foods would benefit me

on the water. I took enough food for 52 days, and it was largely vegetarian food as it's easier on your digestion. There was a lot of focus on ensuring I had a lot of snacks because you never want to feel hungry or depleted in energy. I found food was really important for mood regulation, so I avoided sugary snacks to prevent sugar spikes. Hydration was very important, too. I took electrolytes with my water, which I processed on the boat from sea water.'

RECOVERY

'The hardest part was the sleep deprivation. Before setting off, I did a lot of work with a sleep scientist around how much sleep I would need for recovery, but it all went out the window thanks to the weather conditions and terrifying waves. You never switch off as a solo rower, and I never ever felt safe on the water, so sleep was always

interrupted. I never got more than 30 minutes sleep without being woken by an alarm to check the boat. Unsurprisingly, I ended up exhausted, and experienced hallucinations. I've indulged in a lot of food and wine since I got back, but I needed a mental break from the pressure of the challenge once it was over, and I decided not be too hard on myself. I've recently felt the itch to get back to a more normal routine and focus on training again.'

VITAL KIT

'When you're on an expedition and you have nothing, you find it's the small things that maintain morale. A comfy pillow and a sleeping bag liner really were my only comfort, aside from snacks. And I took a lot of talc and nappy rash cream, because keeping your backside in check when you're permanently sat down is really difficult!'

'My greatest achievement...'

'Rowing the Atlantic solo took absolutely everything, and I don't think I've ever put so much effort into one thing. I decided to do the challenge in 2018, but it's taken so long to come to fruition. Learning to row, taking exams on seamanship, training and running a campaign around a full-time job was one thing. Having the attempt moved back a year (I was meant to set off February 2021) due to travel restrictions, when I'd already shipped my boat to the start line and moved out of my apartment, was tough. But I never gave up. The whole thing pushed me outside my comfort zone and brought great things into my life.'

Evans rowed 14-16 hours each day of the crossing

To find out more about Evans' mission to tackle gender inequality in women's sport, visit Sea Change Sport (seachangesport.com)



Words: Joanna Ebsworth | Photography: With thanks to Jane Stockdale (janestockdale.co.uk)