

# THE YOUNG MAN AND THE SEA

How one extreme adventurer is preparing for the ultimate “round-trip”

Text by KEITH GORDON Photography by ANDREAS LINDLAHR



As Boris Herrmann prepares for next year's Vendée Globe, an around-the-world solo, non-stop sailing regatta, he doesn't sugarcoat the challenges he faces. The German racing sailor, who perhaps understands the dangers and difficulties better than anyone, refers to the roughly three-month ordeal as the “Everest of the sea.” Except rather than being surrounded by teammates and Sherpas who can assist in the event of difficulty or disaster, Herrmann will be all alone in the middle of the world's most expansive and unpredictable oceans.

Circumnavigating the globe by sea, first achieved by the Magellan-Elcano expedition in 1522, is one of the rare achievements that doesn't appear to have gotten much easier in the centuries since, despite advances in technology, meteorology, communication and navigation. Especially when it's attempted solo, a daunting challenge of both physical and mental fortitude. “It's really a very exclusive adventure,” the 38 year-old mariner tells *Maxim*. “Less than a hundred people have ever done it, have ever succeeded in completing the race.”

But the German competitive sailor isn't looking to simply finish and survive such an arduous and potentially dangerous race around the world, but to do so with the drive to compete that has led him to success throughout his sailing career. “I'm very much a racing sailor,” he says. “Not too much for saying ‘I just want to finish’. I hope to do well in the race.” After placing fifth in his last big trans-Atlantic solo race, Herrmann has set his sights on victory in the Vendée Globe. “We're in second place in the ongoing ranking of the championship, so I'm going into this very ambitious. I really want to do well in the race.”

To achieve this immense goal, Herrmann has surrounded himself with a team of experts, and together they are training and maintaining his purpose-built yacht, the *Malizia II*, for the upcoming contest. With the support of friend and fellow accomplished yachtsman Pierre Casiraghi, Vice-President of the Yacht Club de Monaco, Herrmann is leaving nothing to chance. The boat itself is a marvel of advanced design and Spartan amenities, measuring in at around 60 feet. The effort to cut any “fat” from the boat has been extreme, as only the absolute essentials remain in a sport where weight saving is vital. According to Herrmann, there is a “long culture of weight saving with race sailing and it's completely madness. You don't paint the boat inside white to make it more livable because of the half kilo of paint.”

Years of preparation ensure the pinnacle of performance on the open ocean. “We usually say 80% of that success is determined before the start,” admits Herrmann. “A very meticulous preparation is



Herrmann with Will Harris, his co-skipper for the Fastnet race and the Transat Jacques Vabre race which was slated to take place in October 2019

done by the team. Every screw on the boat is checked. Every little piece of metal or carbon fiber or titanium is very solidly checked and optimized so that involves many work hours every year to go through the boat and prepare it." This of course leaves little to no room for comforts of any kind. Boris makes do with a single iPad and noise-cancelling headphones for entertainment during the unrelenting hours on the sea, as a television or other distractions would prove to be speed-killing extra weight.

Despite his expertise, and the caution he takes with the assistance of advanced weather modeling and forecasts, the dangers are obvious. "We have been sailing around a typhoon in the China Sea in 2015. I have gone through the ice of the northeast passage. We've had hurricanes or cyclones on all oceans so I've had quite a few situations but usually with weather models nowadays we can foresee them coming and usually get ourselves in the right spot so it's not any severe risk or danger. That's something I'm quite proud of, is [with] all the many trips I've done, and twelve years of sailing professionally on the ocean, I've never had a really dangerous situation."

Herrmann began his life on the water with his family, doing recreational sailing before discovering racing at a local sailing club when he was a teenager. Combining his love of racing, and his love of ocean sailing, he was soon one of the brightest stars on the competitive ocean sailing scene. Shorter journeys eventually led to longer adventures like this past summer's headline-grabbing, trans-Atlantic journey with teen climate-activist Greta Thunberg, which enabled the young environmentalist to travel to the United Nations in New York City from Europe without the carbon footprint resulting from air travel.

"Going out with a team, of course, has a whole other aspect to it," he says. "It is a great pleasure to share this feeling and the fascination and the different emotions of stress or fear and joy, to share that with



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a group. So I really like both and I wouldn't call myself a solo sailor because I have done much more group sailing in my life than solo sailing. I really like both."

While Herrmann enjoyed the trip, and the education it provided him on vital environmental issues, he still enjoys the unique lifestyle that is life alone on the open sea. "I like contrast and being alone sometimes is very inspiring and refreshing. It's a real adventure to go out to sea with such a big machine and then you feel it, you stand there and the boat sails so fast and you feel like the master of the universe."



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