



Kirsten Neuschäfer – Journey of a Lifetime

There's only one woman taking on the 2022 Golden Globe race and she happens to be South African. Port Elizabeth sailor Kirsten Neuschäfer is currently preparing for the epic 48,000km solo round-the-world challenge.

Speaking about what made her decide to take part, Neuschäfer explained: "I absolutely love adventure, and I love single-handing. This race ticks both of those boxes. A race, where there is a very large element of luck, and where emphasis is on good seamanship, rather than how high-tech and fast the boat is - with a very large element of the unknown - not having modern forecasting, and navigating by sextant. It takes sailing and ocean voyage back to its pure essence."

Preparation is already well under way and Neuschäfer is currently based in Prince Edward Island, refitting her Cape George 36, Minnehaha, for the race. She sailed there in January from Newfoundland, where she bought the boat.

"The preparation is huge: It started with finding a suitable boat - one that fits the race rules. As this is a retro race, the boats need to be of a design that predates 1988, no longer than 36 feet, long keels, keel-hung rudders etc. So, even just choosing the right design for me was a lot of research and travelling around looking at boats," she said.

"Once I had decided on the Cape George 36, I needed to find one for sale at a price I could afford. Now I am into doing a very extensive refit. I have been busy with it since January, and would have liked to have started sooner, but the pandemic delayed me in getting to my boat.

"I hope to have the boat launched in June, and then practise sailing her under jury rig, before stepping the mast. I am getting an entire new rig too, and there will be much to be experimented with and tweaked. Thereafter I need to get out there and sail her as much as possible in all kinds of conditions - especially storm conditions. I need to sharpen up on my celestial navigation, and SSB skills, and also make sure I am physically in top condition before the race. There is not a moment to lose.

"Among other things I need to study the historical weather data, to know how best to choose my route, and make sure I have the right charts, publications, safety equipment.

In and amongst all this, I am running my campaign to raise the necessary funds that I need, and try to keep anyone who is interested in following, up-to-date with progress, via social media and the monthly newsletter.”

The race sets off in September 2022 from Les Sables d'Olonne, France and Neuschäfer is relishing the challenge ahead.

“At this stage, I am looking forward to being on the race, after the great rush to get to the startline is over, and just really zoning into the sailing - where I start to feel 100 per cent comfortable on my boat - like almost being one with it, and out at sea...” she said. “Where the absolute rat-race of getting to the startline starts to fade, and I can tweak my boat to feel her perform at her best with the elements, where I can sit back and observe the sea, the sky around me - and suddenly know for certain why I undertook to participate in this adventure.”

As for being the only female contestant so far, she added: “It does not really feel particularly strange, as I am so used to having been mostly the only female delivery skipper in the circles I was moving in, the only female charter skipper on Skip Novak's boats so far etc, so I guess I am quite used to being in a relatively male-dominated industry. I would welcome other women entrants, but otherwise I am happy to race against the guys as an equal.”

Having started sailing as a young child on the Hartebeestpoort and Heyshope dams inland, as well as the Swartvlei and Knysna Lagoon - on optimists, dabchicks, hobie cats and wind surfers, Neuschäfer has gone on to forge an incredible career. She's also no stranger to extreme challenges, having cycled around 15,000km down the African continent from Europe to South Africa on her own.

“I truly love adventure - it really is what drives me. And I love to undertake these adventures alone, and know that I only have myself to rely on once I am out there, to know that I will have to dig deep within myself to find the strength that I need to overcome the inevitable obstacles. I love the unknown! It really is a way to get to know myself, and to know my own potential - very much an inner journey too,” she explained.



As far as her career goes, sailing has certainly opened plenty of doors.

“I have sailed the South African coast extensively, and in the 12 years of doing international deliveries, I was lucky enough to get to sail to the Americas, Caribbean, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Seychelles, Reunion, Malaysia etc with stops on many islands, like St. Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha, Fernando de Noronha, Cape Verdes, Canaries, St. Paul, Madagascar, Bermuda, etc, as well as passage through the Suez Canal.

“In the last years since 2015, I have been sailing on Skip Novak's "Pelagic" and "Pelagic Australis", around Falklands, South Georgia, Patagonia and Antarctic Peninsula.”

Speaking about her favourite destinations visited, there are many on Neuschäfer's list.

“I still find the stretch sailing from East London to Durban one of the most amazing and often adrenalin-filled coastlines, with usually plenty of marine life and such beautiful features to be seen, like Hole in the Wall and the Bluff Waterfall.

“South Georgia is also a most breath-taking sub-Antarctic island, teeming with wildlife, with glaciers, fjords and breath-taking mountain peaks, and the Antarctic Peninsula another vast and untamed, icy wilderness.

“Similarly I have enjoyed some of the more tropical islands where you can dive off the boat for an early morning snorkel, like in the Indian Ocean - Seychelles and Maldives, or Cape Verde in the Atlantic is a particular favourite if mine - great surfing, snorkelling - lovely



people and music. It's hard to say - after a long passage, land is always welcome and the



sea really has been a road to so many amazing places!”

For now though the focus is on preparing for the massive solo journey around the world and Neuschäfer is grateful for all the support she has received so far.

“Some people have that I am crazy. Others supportive and support and been the most common MUST do this!” If it had encouragement and well as in services and equipment), I would now in this campaign.”



gone as far as saying have been really encouraging - in fact, encouragement has response: saying: "You not been for all the support (financial, as labour, parts and not be where I am right

To lend your support to Neuschäfer’s campaign and for more information, head to her website: kirstenggr.com

“I am also really glad if people wish to be a part of the journey and follow along via Facebook and Instagram,” she added.

