

***'Finishing is Winning'* | The Dubai to Muscat Offshore Sailing Race 2020 Review**

This week, now that the crews and boats are all safely back at DOSC, the Sail On Sunday takes the opportunity to reflect on what will, in time, prove to be a pivotal year in the history of the Dubai to Muscat Offshore Sailing Race.

As you may well be aware, we are Dubai *Offshore* Sailing Club. 'Offshore' is a word that you see as you pass through the Club entrance. It is a word that is core to our history. And it's a word that is integral to the Club's DNA. After all, a significant number of the boats that have berthed in the DOSC marina over the course of our history arrived in Dubai after sailing long distances.

The Dubai to Muscat Offshore Race is the longest, toughest and most challenging sailing race in the region today. A blue-ribbon event on every serious sailor's bucket list, the race has an infectious personality that draws sailors back time and time again. With a course that runs from the Arabian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman past the infamous Straits of Hormuz, sailors are out of sight of land for much of the race and yet their strategy is wholly influenced by the geography around them; mountains and khors dictate where to find wind while the sweeping curve of the Omani coastline and the bays and headlands of the Iranian coast create sea breezes, wind bends and shut offs. Famed as a light airs race, crews invariably face every wind strength from all directions. And, after starting in sight of one of the world's most impressive urban skylines, there is an inescapable lure to the finish when the crews find themselves embraced by the old-world charm of Muscat.

Due to recent political tensions, the status of the race was uncertain for a long time. With the backing of the UAE and Omani Authorities, in addition to support from many stakeholder organisations, the race began to take shape with only a few weeks to go. The fact that this year's Dubai to Muscat race happened at all is a result of the wise leadership of His Excellency Sheikh Khalid, President of the UAE Sailing & Rowing Federation. We are grateful for His Excellency's vision and unwavering support of the sport of sailing.

Our gratitude also goes to the tireless efforts of David Worrall who, as every competitor knows, devotes a huge amount of effort to ensure the success of the race every year, backed by a great team that includes Phil, John, Kat, Andy, and the race committee, Nick, Simon and Mike. The race would not have gone ahead without the efforts of the organising team who, as testament to their hard work, got 15 boats out on the start line. Coming from such uncertainty, this was a fantastic turn out and a credit to the organisers, skippers and crews.

From a fantastic 15 starters, 12 boats made it to Muscat. Without diving into the history books, I can only assume that this must be amongst the highest ratio of finishers since the race started 28 years ago.

When it comes to the Dubai to Muscat Race, the credo 'Finishing is Winning' stands strong. Most sailors enter a race to win or, at least, to do well. It is hard to explain the emotion of finishing this race; gratitude and relief are obvious on the faces of all those disembarking in Muscat, along with pride in having managed to stay the course. At some point between crossing the finish line and stepping off onto the dock there is a realisation that overcoming all the challenges of the race, both on a personal level and collectively as a crew, overshadows any placing or position. Personally, the memory of having to retire from the race two years ago was much more of a motivation to win than coming second last year.

I could write all about the ins and outs of this race but it seems everybody was glued to the tracker so you know what happened!

With 12 boats having reached Muscat there are 12 winners of this remarkable race and that's the real story. This amazing spectrum of boats, crews, nationalities, sailing backgrounds all united by one shared purpose, now bonded by one shared camaraderie: 2020 Finishers.

Maverick, becalmed with no real hope of imminent breeze to set off again, retired and motored on to Muscat. The Race itself offers an exclusive opportunity to smooth the logistics of sailing to Muscat in order to explore this beautiful coastline. For the crew of **Maverick**, the destination was a greater focus and reward than the journey. Skipper John Ashcroft will no doubt be happy to speak to any other skippers about the benefit of simply getting to Muscat and experiencing some amazing cruising.

After **Pascells Wager** suffered a broken mast track halfway round, the majority of sailors finding themselves in this situation would have turned around for home. Not these two! **PW** motored into Dibba, made repairs and then continued on by sail and motor to Muscat. Rod and Jen, your grit and determination makes you winners.

Last year's winners **Exodus** made the best of both worlds by sailing a great race before spinning the boat back around to explore the sensational Musandam Peninsula. Past master of both the race and cruising, Skipper Phil Ellerby is another fountain of information on both opportunities.

Binker, **Natika** and **Shona** all suffered the agony of early retirements last year. No doubt that fueled their collective determination to reach Muscat with a sure sense of satisfaction – which subsequently created quite a competitive Club Class Race! Hats off to these boats for sheer dogged perseverance!

Having participated twice previously, **Rusalka** reached the finish line at the third attempt taking Line Honors! She finished in an impressive two days, 16 hours, 35minutes and 10 seconds, successfully winning her class. Skipper Gerald supported by Lars are certainly beginning to discover the capabilities of the most stunning boat in the fleet.

The First 27 '**Totoro**' and the Corsair F28R '**Sabotage**' represented two of the smallest entries in the race for many years. To the untrained eye, these two teams forwent comfort, space and privacy to compete, but when you meet these crews it is clear that they are passionate about their ships. Both should be rightly proud to finish the race in tougher conditions than most.

At the sharp end of the race were **El Seraya** and **Pink Diamond**, both of whom were 'in it to win it'. These two boats cement the credibility of the Race by maintaining the highest level of competition. Well prepared, well experienced and well sailed, these are two names you should expect to see on the trophy in coming years. In fact, there's little chance of either team giving up until they do!

Twister, the first ever boat to win the race Doublehanded. This is an achievement Matt and I are incredibly proud of and one that could not have been achieved without the support of our colleagues, friends and family. To be honest, winning the race hasn't actually sunk in yet; at

the heart of it, we're just two mates who had the privilege to sail to Muscat and back – and who will remain forever thankful for the opportunity to do so. Finishing was winning.

The three retirees also deserve to be mentioned. It was a mammoth effort to get **AS Saif** to the start line for the skipper and crew and it is such a shame that additional challenges cut their race short. The presence of a Volvo 60 not only strengthens the credibility of the race, it creates a magic feeling for the everyday sailors who get to line up on the start line alongside a world famous ocean racing yacht.

Sheikh Suhail at the helm of **Dubai Dragonfly** led the multihull class on multiple occasions and was sailing beautifully before retiring, one to watch for future races.

Two-time race winner David Worrall onboard **Shahrazad** faced very early equipment failure. A cruel blow to the man who puts so much into making the race happen. Regardless, as someone who knows from personal experience that Offshore Racing is never plain sailing, David pragmatically accepted his fate; in fact, he positioned his boat in Dibba and gladly aided and assisted the return crews, all of whom are very grateful.

We all hope to see these boats back on the start line next year!

Because we are publishing this piece on International Women's Day 2020 we would like to dedicate special mention to six inspirational sailors. Although there is a long way to go to improve female participation in Offshore sailing, half of the boats that reached Muscat did so with a female crew member on board. Even more impressively, there were 11 women starting the race – with 50% male-female crew on board the Volvo 60.

Pia (on board Binker) and **Jen** (on board Pascells Wager) sailed shorthanded with only three and two crew in total respectively. A defiant feat of endurance, and a showcase of sailing talent.

Sabien (on board Rusalka) and **Eva** (on board Maverick) reached Muscat on the two biggest boats, both equally sharing the trimming, helming and watch keeping as integral members of both crews.

Chloe (on board Totoro) and **Rita** (on board Sabotage) reached Muscat as crew on the two smallest boats in the race, a tough journey for any sailor.

Congratulations to the female sailors, especially those who finished the race. You race as equals and, while you may not care for individual acclaim, your achievements and stories will no doubt inspire more female sailors to take part and go on to achieve their own goals, in both sailing and life beyond.

Today we celebrate women's achievements, #EachforEqual



Rusalka Sailing Through the 'Gap' under gennaker