

COCONUT'S PREPARATIONS

By Mark Sinclair



Mark Sinclair meeting Sir Robin Knox-Johnston at the Paris Boat Show

Here is an update from Mark Sinclair for his preparations for *Coconut* and the 2018 Golden Globe Race.

On 6 December last year, I had the great pleasure of meeting Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, the first person to sail solo, non-stop and unassisted around the world in 1968 - 69. By accomplishing this feat, Sir Robin became the winner of the Sunday Times Golden Globe Race. We met up at the conference for the 2018 Golden Globe Race (GGR) which was held at the Paris Boat Show. Interestingly, I found out that Sir Robin and I share a connection through a mutual acquaintance: Lieutenant John Leech. They served together on the frigate *HMS Duncan*, Sir Robin as a watchkeeping and communications officer in the RNR and John as the navigating officer. During this time Sir Robin was also preparing his yacht *Suhaili* for the historic first circumnavigation. In 1987, I was the navigating officer of the hydrographic ship *HMAS Moresby* under the command of Commander John Leech RAN, who by that time had transferred from the RN to the RAN. John subsequently was promoted to Commodore and later served as the Hydrographer, RAN. Small world indeed!

To celebrate the start of the 2018 GGR, it is planned for at least two vessels from the original race to be present: *Suhaili* and *Joshua*. Sir Robin still owns *Suhaili*, recently refitting

her and so she is once again ship-shape. *Joshua* was sailed by Bernard Moitessier and is named after the first solo circumnavigator, Joshua Slocum. She is well cared for by the Maritime Museum of La Rochelle in France. Although Moitessier did not complete the original race, he continued on his voyage in the Southern Ocean to 'save his soul' as it were, sailing one-and-a-half circumnavigations and finally stopping in Tahiti after 10 months at sea. Both *Suhaili* and *Joshua* are legendary.

The GGR committee is currently evaluating whether the race in 2018 will start from Falmouth or Plymouth. The original race required participants to depart from any port north of latitude 40 degrees north between 1 June and 31 October, 1968. Participants started from a number of ports in the UK and Ireland, including Inishmore, Hamble, Falmouth, Plymouth, Cowes and Teighmouth. The initial plan for the 2018 race was to start in Falmouth on 14 June 2018, the 50th anniversary of *Suhaili's* departure. However, Plymouth is now also being considered as a potential departure point, due to its extensive facilities and very active interest in the race. The fact that four of the nine competitors departed from Plymouth also provides a strong historic link. Both ports are strategically located at the western end of the English Channel and provide relatively easy access to the North Atlantic Ocean. There is currently a competitive process between Falmouth and Plymouth to host the start of the 2018 race and a decision is expected in April.

If Plymouth is successful, there is also the possibility of a short race between Falmouth and Plymouth on the anniversary of the original race, with the actual race departing from Plymouth at the end of June. A delayed departure would have the benefit of better weather conditions for sailors on arrival off the Cape of Good Hope in early spring. Following the GGR conference, I hedged my bets and visited both Falmouth and Plymouth to determine the lay of the land at each port.

You may have noticed that *Coconut* returned to the RSAYS on 1 December last year. We have subsequently reshipped her mast with new standing and running rigging, new headsail and staysail furlers, new boom and spinnaker poles. All halyards now lead back to the new doghouse to minimise time spent on the foredeck which will improve safety. At the time of writing, a new pulpit, pushpit and solid guardrails at a height of 80 cm are being fitted. Heavy Sampson posts and fairleads from which to tow warps in the event of heavy seas have been manufactured and are being fitted to the quarters. New tracks have been fitted for sheeting the headsail and staysail, and new sails have also been made. You may have noticed the distinctive bright orange band at the head of *Coconut's* new mainsail, as well as the go-fast stripes

near the head of her mast and on the boom. *Coconut* is highly conspicuous with her orange livery, and I am frequently recognised during initial trials in the Port River and in Gulf St Vincent. You may have also noticed *Coconut's* race number on her sails, the lucky 88.

The next priorities are to install the ship's batteries, solar panels, wiring, lights, engine instrumentation and communications equipment, including HF transceiver and receiver, VHF and RDF. Refurbishment is also required down below following her refit, including installing a bookcase on the starboard side of the main saloon where the lockers were removed to strengthen the hull. Future work also includes building an emergency rudder, making the companionway more watertight, reorganising bilge pumps and installing a life raft. There is also a lot of cosmetic work to be done which hopefully time and resources will allow. Recently, I resilvered my sextant mirrors, and tracked down and purchased a 1904 US navy chronometer and deck watch for navigation. These are currently being cleaned and rated, and will serve as my primary timepieces for astro-navigation during the voyage.

Very soon it will be a matter of sailing and testing *Coconut* in a wide variety of conditions to make sure everything works, is practical and is optimised. I will have to race her efficiently and in the right direction for a period of 10 months without outside assistance, so no amount of trials and spares will be too much! The current plan is to transport *Coconut* to the UK at the end of the year as deck cargo on a container



Coconut's race number on her new mainsail. Photo: Mark Sinclair

ship, in order to be prepositioned for the race in good time.

I am very grateful for all the help and encouragement I am receiving from members of RSAYS and elsewhere. I wouldn't be able to undertake this project without such support! If you are interested

you can follow *Coconut's* preparations on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/CoconutGGR/> ('likes' are highly appreciated), and the Golden Globe Race at <http://goldenglobrace.com/>

The clock is ticking ...



Coconut's deck is starting to come back together after the refit. Photo: Mark Sinclair