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Headline News

Last But Not Least

AlphaGraphics Arrival Caps the Race

Cheerful crew arrives in time for party.



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[St Malo, France](#) -- 29 Aug 2001 17:38 GMT The all-woman team, *AlphaGraphics*, crossed the finish line here at 15:06:57 GMT today. Their total elapsed time for the leg was 14 days, 23 hours, 6 minutes and 57 seconds.

"We're here, we made it!" shouted skipper Helena Darvelid as spectator boats crowded next to the women's yacht. "And just in time for the prize giving and party planned for the night."

The AlphaGraphics team was met at the dock by a large crowd of family and well-wishers. Skipper Darvelid slipped the boat into her spot in front of the Hatherleigh, the AlphaGraphics tender.

As has become his custom, Nick Moloney, the winning skipper from *Kingfisher*, hopped on board and sprayed the women with champagne before giving them all hugs.

"The last day was so frustrating," Darvelid said. "The winds were shifty, then it switched to the east where we were going."

The relief of being ashore and finished was evident, as the AlphaGirls quickly made plans to shower and dress for the prize-giving ceremony.

The frustration of still being at sea with everyone else long since in port became almost unbearable toward the end, said Anne Monmousseau. "We talked about turning the engine on," she said.

But she said after completing an epic voyage like the *EDS Atlantic Challenge*, to arrive under power would not have felt right.

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As it is, although they finished sixth and last, they completed every leg. *FILA* and *Sill*, both of which scored higher than AlphaGraphics, cannot make that claim.

A Long, Lonely, but Cheerful Road

The women of AlphaGraphics deserve a special award for perseverance, endurance and optimism. The boats at the front of the fleet get all the glory while the tailenders are usually the ones who have the most difficult time and, being last in, have to endure the hard times much longer.

From the beginning they were handicapped, starting with a much older boat and with barely a month to throw together a team. But skipper Helena Darvelid proved that although the boat is not a winner, the team certainly is.

Her goal was to finish the race. "Our priority is to get there safe and sound. Just to finish is a great result for us," she declared.

Barely a week before the start of the leg, the boat was out of water in Hamble, UK, after a "minor collision" before the Hoya Round the Island Race. Although Darvelid did not appear concerned at the time, it reduced the time the crew could sail and practice together.

It was evident at the start of Leg 1 that the crew was unfamiliar with the boat and with each other; they struggled with raising the main and their teamwork appeared un-coordinated. But they put on a good show and were up with the leaders.

However, as the days rolled on the crew began to gel, as one would expect. It was then that the boat itself became the problem. The yacht, formerly called *This Time*, was built in 1992 and is the oldest boat in the fleet.

From the start, the boat was plagued with electrical problems. The hard pounding the boat took on Leg 2 caused leaks in the forward ballast tanks that turned the forepeak into a swimming pool. All were problems a newer boat almost certainly wouldn't experience. The team also lost their life raft overboard in the middle of the Dover Straits and had to punch holes in it to get it back on board.

Arriving in Portsmouth at the end of Leg 2, with barely time enough to shower and get the boat cleaned up, the team remained cheerful and focused.

Despite a long work list -- "How long do you want to listen?" -- they were at the start on time, ready for the first of the two trans-Atlantic crossings.

Before leaving Portsmouth, Darvelid disclosed that the team's strategy was to take the southerly track across the Atlantic. This route tends to be kinder on the boats and crews and at one stage prior to the race, there was discussion about setting a waypoint off the Azores to keep the boats on this safer route. But that plan was discarded amidst some controversy.

As the leg progressed, AlphaGraphics continued to lose miles to the leaders, but never lost the enthusiasm for the race. Darvelid's daily logs and satellite calls were almost always upbeat and optimistic, with only a few moments of frustration and despondency.

It was on this leg that the incident that everyone fears happened.

The storm they had been battling was abating and crewmember Asia Pajkowska stuck her head above decks to check out the conditions, when a rogue wave swept her overboard. Being unharnessed she was quickly swept away, disappearing among the waves.

Co-skipper Carol Archer saw her go, and immediately alerted the crew, who in an amazing feat of seamanship brought the boat around, dropped the sails and within 20 minutes had Pajkowska back on board.

It took a day or so for them to regain their focus, and continue to Baltimore. AlphaGraphics, on her southerly route, took less of a beating than the rest of the fleet up north, a matter of some envy amongst the boats.

They recorded warm days and starry nights while the rest of the fleet up north

were cold and wet and bruised from the severe conditions. They brought the boat into Norfolk just 20 hours before the start of Leg 4, three days after *Gartmore* finished.

Another severe problem had surfaced during the leg, and one which they requested not be made public so as not to alarm family and friends. The keel bolts apparently were loose, but upon inspection by a surveyor, it was deemed safe for them to continue.

The sprint up the coast to Boston on Leg 4 was just that, a full sprint and got them into Boston with time to prepare for the second transat leg. The delayed start was a bonus and the AlphaGirls had time to rest up, and the boats and crew were ready for the start off Boston Harbour.

Looking well and rested, the start off Boston sent them on a middle course between the boats going south, Sill and FILA, and the northerly *Kingfisher* and *ECOVER*.

Darvelid said at the start they would stay on the Great Circle route, the shortest route, as she was not willing to take the boat up into the more dangerous seas near the ice.

Even though the course chosen was shorter, the slower boat was no match for the others and they continued to lose ground.

Just missing lows and shifts, Darvelid wrote in one log, "We have got ourselves into a bit of high pressure and this was not by choice. We were not fast enough and lost the low in front of us."

But as the leading boats neared the finish, their winds began to diminish, while the breeze at the back of the fleet freshened and the all-woman team ate some of the miles separating them from the rest of the fleet.

There were even a couple of days where AlphaGraphics posted the fastest speeds in the fleet. But it wasn't enough of a break for them and they continued to lose ground.

Despite the handicaps they have faced, the disasters they have overcome, and the frustrations they have endured, the AlphaGirls have made it through, smiling and happy, a testament to endurance and teamwork that has been evident from the start.

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