

Fastnet Race 2013 entry – Quantum Sailing Diary

Following Quantum Sailing's Fastnet Race 2013 campaign – this diary is our 'soup to nuts' account of what's involved in preparing for and participating in one of the world's most challenging offshore races. We hope that this will be useful to others considering doing something similar in the future.

Jan 2012: **First thoughts – From random idea to race entry**

The idea of a Quantum Sailing entry in the Fastnet Race was planted some time ago but I think that it really started to take hold last August. This was when a couple of us were out on Quantum Leap, sailing just off Cowes, watching the start of the 2011 race.

There was a real buzz around. This had been evident in the marina, as we'd watched crews preparing their boats, and then saying their goodbyes to loved ones. On the water, close to the start line, you could almost feel the excitement. Small cruisers to massive racing machines, professional and amateur crews alike, all were readying themselves for the off, on one of sailing's great adventures.

We followed the fleet down the western Solent, and felt a real sense of disappointment when it was time for us to turn for home, watching the race boats quickly disappearing off into the distance.

The Fastnet is widely regarded as one of the most challenging events on the offshore racing calendar. Starting from Cowes, the fleet sails out of the Solent and past the



Needles before heading west along the South Coast. With prevailing south-westerly winds, this leg is often a long hard beat. After rounding Lands End, the fleet heads off across the Celtic sea towards the Fastnet rock, just a few tantalising miles off the coast of South West Ireland. On this stretch everyone is exposed to the full force of the Atlantic, with no land between them and America to limit the build up of the waves! Here the call of the Guinness is at its most tempting, nevertheless the fleet rounds the rock

and start heading south again. Next, its down to the Scilly Isles to pass another famous landmark: Bishop rock, the most south westerly spot in the UK. From there it's often a downwind run to the finish line at Plymouth.

Whether you finish in a day and half or, as most of the fleet do, in three to five days or longer for some, completing the course of some 608 nautical miles is always a cause for celebration - and they do!

On that day, as we made our way back to Haslar with the race fleet disappearing off into the distance, the conversation inevitably turned to the fact that, 'We should be racing, not going home' and that, 'We should definitely enter the next race in 2013' (it only takes place every two years). It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of the day but there seemed to be enough genuine interest to be worth following up on. So, when I got back, I started sounding out others, starting with people on the Quantum Sailing Network. This is a group of people interested in sailing, many of whom sail regularly with Quantum Sailing. I was surprised at how positive the response was; this race really seems to capture people's imagination.



The Quantum Sailing Network itself was born out of a group of friends who have sailed together, on and off, over a number of years. Initially we chartered boats together, sailing in different locations and sharing the costs. We did all sorts of sailing – a few cross-channel hops, some coastal sailing around the Solent, and the occasional Med trip. The group grew and each time we sailed we had different people onboard. It's been a great way to get to know people.



A few years ago I decided that it was time to follow my passion, spending more time sailing and less time stuck at a computer. One thing led to another and I started up Quantum Sailing, becoming a full-time professional sailor. My aim with this is to combine the professional approach developed though many years of business experience, with the flexibility, friendliness and cost that only a small operator can provide. Feedback so far has been great.

I now do a lot of sailing, including deliveries and teaching, but importantly, I still sail with the Network members on a regular basis. We still do the sort of sailing everyone likes. The Network is more formally structured now and the sailing professionally

organised, but it's important to me that we make everyone onboard feel like they are sailing with friends.

The Network is continuing to grow and we welcome new people all the time. Do get in contact if you'd like to join us or if you'd just like us to send you our regular updates about what the Network is up to and what opportunities are available.

Anyway, back to the Fastnet race idea. Our plans really started to gain momentum later in the year, when I was out with a number of the keener Network members for a (chilly) late season outing, a weekend run in November down to Weymouth. When the Fastnet was mentioned, pretty much the whole crew wanted to go for it. So after that, it was time to look seriously at the options and understand exactly what was involved in participating.



I had to do some research as the Fastnet race is a challenging event and not to be taken lightly. Even non-sailors are aware of the tragic outcome of the infamous Fastnet Race of 1979. You can't just turn up and go; there's a lot of preparation to be done for both yacht and crew.

Much has changed in the regulation of offshore racing since 1979 and both crews and yachts have to be better prepared now. The boat must meet stringent safety standards laid down by ISAF (International Sailing Federation - the world governing body for sailing). The crew must demonstrate their experience too. In the year leading up to the main race, they must complete other offshore races together (more about the prep required later). But, having looked into it, it did seem to be practical, so I decided to put a plan together for our entry.

The first thing I had to do, in order to be able to set costs, was to decide on an appropriate package of training and preliminary races (more about that in a future update). The real test then was to see if there were enough positive confirmations from the Network members, when they had seen the whole package. The response was really great; before even putting it out to the rest of the Network we had four of the potential crew of six signed up!

So now we're up and running. We fully intend to be on the start line on 11th August 2013 but this time we will be crossing it with the other boats, not watching it from the sidelines. If you'd be interested in joining the crew (more about them later too), please get in contact. But be quick, places are limited.

If you keep reading this diary, you'll get to know the crew as we go through the preparation and preliminary races, so we hope that you'll be rooting for us during the race itself. Better still, come and join the party when we reach Plymouth!

Glenn Smallcombe