

Porty pals pull together to conquer Atlantic rowing challenge

Five Portobello pals are testing the strength of their friendship as they tackle a 3,000 mile trip across the Atlantic in a rowing boat.

The quintet set off from La Gomera in the Canary Islands on 12 December and hope to make landfall in Antigua in the Caribbean about 40 days later, raising funds for two charities.

Atlantic Body & Soul is the only Scottish team taking part in this year's Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, and Sean Watters, Matt Callis, Ed van der Ven, Alec Martin and Cal MacAninch are all members of Eastern Amateur Coastal Rowing Club in Portobello.

The crew are facing physical extremes and sleep deprivation as they row two hours on, two hours off for up to six weeks, during which time they will complete an estimated three million strokes.



Altantic Body & Soul crew members practicing at Portobello before the cross Atlantic challenge – pic by Vicki Watson
All experienced and resilient rowers, the crew includes a house builder, a joiner, site manager, impact investor and well-known actor Cal who has appeared in Line of Duty, Downton Abbey, Mr Selfridge, Trigger Point, and will soon star in new Scottish drama Mayflies, alongside Martin Compston, Ashley Jensen and Tony Curran.

Their Rannoch 45 boat draws inspiration from lifeboats of the 1960s and the self-righting vessel combines shelter with storage space for equipment and supplies.

The charities benefiting from the rowing challenge are Body & Soul, a frontline charity that provides practical and therapeutic support for people of all ages who have experienced grave trauma in childhood, and The Junction, a safe, friendly, confidential centre offering services and support for young people in Edinburgh aged 12-21.

Before they set off on the journey Cal MacAninch, said: “We row for Eastern Coastal Rowing Club in Portobello so we’re used to rowing at sea. But the races that we train for all year are short races. Coastal rowing is one of the fastest growing sports in the country, in the world even.

“We had to do 120 hours compulsory training on our ocean rowing boat, so we took the boat up north, rowed out of Loch Carron and then headed north, up across the Minch to Ullapool and then back down again.

“The first three days we were pretty much in headwinds the whole way with rain, and it was pretty uncomfortable, but the last day was rowing from the Gairloch to Portree in beautiful sunshine.



The crew are all members of the Eastern Amateur Coastal Rowing Club in Portobello – pic by Vicki Watson

“What we learned was that the boat’s really stable, it is really safe, it’s almost impossible to sink, and our goal is to row across the Atlantic, finish it, stay alive, come back

friends and raise lots of money for charities.”

“You can’t really prepare for the Atlantic swell in the waves you might be seeing in Scotland,” added Alec Martin.

“It’s a kind of once in a lifetime opportunity to test yourself to be somewhere really wild. The world is increasingly small and help is increasingly at hand the whole time, so to be literally days and days and days away from the nearest assistance is quite a unique feeling.

“We will do two hours on and two hours off, roughly, but it’ll be a bit weather dependent and it depends on how we’re all feeling. But that’s the rough pattern, which is linked in to the body sleep cycle.”

Suzanne Campbell, Service Manager at The Junction, said: “We are inspired and in awe of the team taking on such a huge task, not only to challenge themselves but to support the health and wellbeing of young people in Leith and NE Edinburgh.”

Cal’s wife, Shauna Macdonald, is tracking the crew’s progress on the Atlantic Body & Soul Facebook page.

The latest update on 15 December included: “Extremely tough. Big waves and strong head winds. Time is playing tricks on them. Sores and blisters already. Hoping for smoother conditions from tomorrow onward. Morale remains high.”

You can follow [Atlantic Body & Soul and sponsor the team here](#).

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