

Once more, Team Shrewsbury headed north to complete in this ever popular 'Type Two Fun' endurance event. The famous mountaineer and sailor, HW Tilman, in whose wake the race is inspired, used to advertise in The Times by writing "Hand wanted for long voyage in small boat: no pay, no prospects, not much pleasure'. He was always inundated with offers, just as we are: this year a hardy ten L6 were selected, happy to put up with the confines of a small yacht, in cold seas and high mountains.

We benefited from the return for a third time of skipper Alasdair Darroch (OS) on Indigo, his Sweden Yachts 390 and co-sailor Bob Stones. Both put up with the most extraordinary intrusion and out and out discomfort, not least sailing continuously for three straight days and nights. Their endless patience, good humour, and genuine desire to educate and inspire is truly remarkable.

Leaving at Thursday lunchtime, the long drive north saw us crossing the Scottish border in torrential rain with highs of 9 degrees – with snow on the biggest peaks it was set to be the coldest race yet! Arriving very late in Oban, we swiftly passed our rucksack kit inspections and headed to bed, ready for the great adventure that lay ahead.

At midday on Friday, having brought the boat round to the start line, Georgia and Emilia were the Shrewsbury pair for the running start, a hilly 5 mile 'sharpener.' This was preceded by the mass diving into the dinghies, a mad paddle into the bay and a scramble onboard Indigo. Somewhat typically, we managed to time our exit out of Oban Bay with that of the enormous CalMac ferry. Five severe toots of the horn were enough to make us back off, desperately shouting out the depth whilst trying to tack in fluky winds. Once out into the Firth of Lorn, Indigo was able to show her true colours, the severe heeling over giving everyone their first taste of a yacht being pushed to her limits. Yet more was to come, just short of Duart Castle, we had to tackle some major overfalls in order to enter the Sound of Mull. The white-water ride was quite dramatic and a real highlight of the trip, even if we were only too glad to finally get into the sound and make our way to our first port of Salen on Mull.

Salen is an innocuous, tiny village, what's more, it feels somewhat bizarre to be thrown into a rubber dinghy whilst still sailing, having to carry a pack and then being cast adrift before desperately paddling ashore. Yet this is how 'Peaks Racing' is done and April, India and Clara were soon back on dry land. By 5.30pm, they had passed their five-minute mandatory kit check and headed off into what proved to be a stunning evening. Back aboard the boat there was a hive of activity in the galley as Bob served up chicken curry to his hungry fellow crew. At this early stage of the race there is little point in resting; cards were played and all relaxed in the evening sun, soaking up the sheer splendour of the mountainous backdrop breathed in.

Meanwhile the Youth Teams were completing a glorious circular route of 19 miles over Ben Talaidh and this year the sunset and surrounding scenery were just extraordinary. As darkness fell, our team took great delight in over taking an all-boys pair who had started out long before us, moving Shrewsbury up from fifth to fourth place. However, in order to stay ahead we required a desperate 'death march' along the road, finishing to cheers at 10.15pm. Many a hug was had; the girls had survived unscathed from their Mull odyssey. Eventually identifying themselves, the paddling runners were soon collected by Indigo, no doubt delighted to be embraced by cheering comrades, a hot curry and later, the extraordinary sight of the northern lights.

It was now a long sail through the night in very light airs. Stemmed by the tide at Fladda and sucked back into the infamous Corryvreckan whirlpool, it became obvious by the morning that a Sunday night completion would never be possible without the engine. Reluctantly, the button was pressed, allowing everyone to enjoy the sights in relative comfort including George Orwell's hideaway (Barnhill) and finally the Mordor like Paps of Jura, our next running target.

At 4pm on Saturday, Craighouse was upon us. Now it was the turn of Archie, Tom and Felix to pass the kit check, pound along the turquoise bay and then leave all sense of civilisation behind by taking to the bogs, boulders, adders (no that they saw one this year!) and tics that are the trademarks of a run on Jura! The 14 miles and two peaks over tough terrain made it slow going, with ample time to take in the epic sights that enveloped the wee team, even if the highest Paps were obscured by cloud. The decent off the final Pap is truly hazardous (no paths on this run), the boys arriving bruised and battered onto the tiny tarmac road in order to bravely charge along to the eagerly awaiting yachts.

As forecast, the wind had now truly set in. Alasdair and Bob wisely took their time to ready the boat for a very long night sail round the dreaded Mull of Kintyre peninsula, including a reef in the main, a briefing for the crew and the handing out of sea-sickness tablets. As Indigo bashed south to windward, they were eventually able to come off the wind, only for the rolling motion to set in. Soon most had succumbed to the awful mal de mer that had so afflicted previous races and were only too glad to see the sight of the mountainous isle of Arran to the north.

Another sunny, if cold day had dawned and at 11am Sunday, Jared and Oli tackled the mighty 20 mile run up Goat Fell and back. The rest of the crew took in the delights of Lamlash Bay, feasting on ice creams, chatting on deck and then deciding to jump recklessly into the sea from the boat – was this really Scotland? Despite Jared's big tumble whilst charging down the mountain, the boys completed their leg in a super time, a real credit to them having waited to so long for their running contribution. A final row to a cheering Indigo and we set off for the final stint, arriving in Troon at 7.30pm, running up the pier and finishing another very long race. As expected, without a fuss, everyone leapt into the minibus, arriving back in Shrewsbury at 1.30am, ready for 8.15am Monday Call Over! Although in the end we were beaten by the much larger yachts of Gordonstoun, Fettes, Glenalmond and Lomond, but in truth the event is much more of an 'experience of a lifetime' than an actual race. Having first entered in 2019, its heartening to now meet Old Salopians who refer to it as their greatest achievement so far, even threatening to enter an adult boat of their own! The pupils this year really were delightful and just like all past competitors, they easily upheld the spirit of Kipling, indeed the race: 'If you can meet with triumph and disaster. And treat those two impostors just the same.'