



## Dee Caffari: Ready to dream again

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Britain's Dee Caffari announced in [June 2017](#) that she would lead the sixth team confirmed for the Volvo Ocean Race 2017-18. Named 'Turn the Tide on Plastic', it would be a mixed, youth focused team with a strong sustainability message. With the race now completed, [Dee reflects on the campaign](#):

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Doesn't it go in the blink of an eye? The past 12 months certainly have and the journey I have been on with the entire Turn the Tide on Plastic team has been incredible. At times, the challenges we have faced have seemed insurmountable, but we have been tenacious and reached the climax of the Volvo Ocean Race in a good place.

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The Turn The Tide on Plastic campaign was the creation of the Volvo Ocean Race's Sustainability partnership. The idea of having a competing boat within the race bearing the name of the UN Environment's Clean Seas initiative, Turn the Tide on Plastic, was a bold and powerful platform from which we could deliver key messages about the effects of plastic pollution. I was invited to lead the project and jumped at the chance to be a part of such an important collaboration.

Casting my mind back to mid June, when this campaign was first announced, it feels as though my life has been on fast forward. In July/August last year I had to select a crew, get from Lisbon to the UK, race in Leg 0, engage in Cowes Week activity, compete in the Fastnet Race and return to Lisbon.



Dee Caffari

September gave me four weeks for training and the compulsory pre-race boatyard maintenance session as well as ensuring the crew attended the obligatory safety and medical courses and completed all their certification, prior to the Prologue race to Alicante in October. There was no respite as the race start proper was shortly after.

At the outset, I was provided with a very specific brief in terms of the make-up of this team. I had been extremely vocal in my support of the incentivised rule change and, as such, was asked to put my money where my mouth was and deliver a fully mixed crew, with an equal male/female ratio. In addition, 80% of the crew were aged under 30 and had never taken part in a Volvo Ocean Race. We also embraced a mix of nationalities, just to make things even more diverse!

The team I created comprised six girls and eight boys and included me as the skipper, Liz Wardley as the Boat Captain, and Martin Stromberg as a Watch Captain. Nico Lunven and Brian Thompson were the navigators on a rotation basis.

Support onshore is equally key when setting up a campaign. Phil Allen, the Team Manager, brought experience from working with Ian Walker on three previous campaigns and Fletcher Kennedy, the Technical Team Manager, had worked with me previously on Team SCA. He had also gained technical experience on three prior campaigns. P

hil and Fletcher each created high performing teams that ensured their areas of responsibility were handled efficiently. They also recruited team members who were completely new to the Volvo Ocean Race world and so our campaign brought fresh skills and talent to this edition of the race.

On paper this team could easily have been written off from the day of the announcement, but it would not be the first time I had metaphorically had to swim against the tide. I wholeheartedly believed in what this campaign was setting out to achieve and knew we could meet the challenge ahead of us.

Throughout my life I have been a strong advocate for inclusivity, equality, and the environment and this campaign brought all these threads together and would allow me to show everyone what could be done. There was no one else who could pull this off and I embraced the opportunity.

We finished Leg 1 alongside Brunel and Leg 2 alongside Scallywag, just behind AkzoNobel, and racing was really close with the whole fleet. This instilled a high level of excitement and sense of pride within the team. However, Leg 3 was to be a different kettle of fish. We were heading into the Southern Ocean with big wind forecast and crew that were inexperienced in the conditions we were about to face.

For the first time in the campaign, I felt the pressure and heavy weight of responsibility. This leg was the first time this crew would experience big waves, the following sea, strong winds sustained for days on end, grey, wet and cold conditions of the Southern Ocean and the reality of just how remote it is down there.

Whilst not a relaxing sail in any way shape or form, it is some of the best sailing you can do and I saw my young sailors grow – in confidence, in self belief and in tenacity. We enjoyed Christmas at sea and arrived into Melbourne on Boxing Day. Just time for a quick New Year party and we were ready to go again, onwards to Hong Kong.

On Leg 4 we were quick out of the blocks, had pace and were leading. We stayed up front until around half way and then, in the terrible doldrums, faced the cloud from hell. We fell behind and finished there. After a cold visit to China, we were determined to follow up on the progress we had made so far in terms of performance and deliver what we now knew we could.

We set off on Leg 6 to Auckland and led the way, yet again. In our minds, we were going to be on the podium. The others were far behind, surely we had this one in the bag. I never said it out loud but I was starting to think it and my crew were starting to believe it. Then the red boats appeared and closed in on us at pace. They overtook in the final two gybes in Auckland harbour and we went from a podium to 5th in what was a devastating end to an epic leg.

Words failed me, I felt robbed and absolutely gutted for my young guys who had sailed so well over the entire three weeks. After such a cruel and swift defeat, I was unsure how to pick this team up and motivate them sufficiently that they would want to get back out and fight as hard again.

Luckily for me VOR legend, Tony Rae, was at home and able to join us for a few days sailing before the race started again. He knew just how far we had come as a team and provided invaluable support. As an outside observer, he was able to talk to the sailors and comment not just on their sailing but also their communication.

The importance of the role of an external coach or mentor cannot be underestimated and this short intervention also provided me with additional support when I needed it most. In any leadership role, providing support and guidance will take its toll, particularly at times of high stress or pressure. It is as important to know when you yourself need space, support or guidance as it is to identify the needs of your team members.

Leg 7 saw us heading back into the Southern Ocean but this time my apprehension was overtaken by excitement. My guys now knew what to expect and were more than ready. It was going to be a gradual arrival into the south, before the cold, brutal, wet and windy conditions kicked in for a week. Provided we displayed good seamanship, the crew could avoid any drama and just enjoy some of the best sailing they will ever experience.

However, tragic events on this leg were to change the whole feel of this edition of the Volvo Ocean Race. We all felt the painful loss of John Fisher, our friend and colleague from Scallywag. He was a huge supporter of our team and what we were doing and his passing affected us all. He may be gone but never forgotten. A difficult leg and another 4th place finish.

A brief beach break in Itajai for us all to recover and it was off to Newport, Rhode Island for Leg 8. We led the charge up the Brazilian coast and fought hard across the Caribbean but met tough weather at the Gulf Stream and dropped to 4th place. Nearing the end of the leg we had a tactical choice to make around a TSS. We had to take a chance and fought for 3rd rather than protect our current 4th. Thick fog and light winds saw us match race AkzoNobel to the finish line only to lose out once more.

Frustration set in after a leg sailed so well but without the deserved result. Interviews on the dock had been depressingly similar for the last few legs as I relived the anticipation of a great result only to face the reality of an average one. I also needed to find a way to rally the troops, who were just as aware as I was that we were running out of opportunities.

Leg 9 was the sprint leg across the Atlantic and worth double points. I was a British skipper heading to a UK stopover for the first time in a long time and we even had our own home grown Welshman on board in Bleddyn Mon. With a good dose of British fortitude, we took the northern, colder route and fought hard. The whole crew pushed us to break the speed record and AkzoNobel set a new race record, surpassing long standing record from a VO70.

Yet again, the racing was close and we finished in the Bristol channel with an unfavourable tide that had just turned for us but allowed Mapfre to finish clear ahead. A 6th place into a UK port was a sad finish but they don't call us British bulldogs for nothing. We are strong in the face of adversity and still had two legs to go.

The penultimate leg from Cardiff took us round Ireland and north of the Orkneys. This section of the race involved a combination of light and strong winds. For a time we even sailed in the wrong direction adding miles to our route. We stayed in contention, fighting at the front of the fleet with all six of our rival boats in sight for most of the leg.

At the northern tip of Scotland we were fighting with AzkoNobel and then switched to battling it out with Dongfeng off the coast of Norway. Finally, we were racing Vestas to a 5th place finish in Sweden. The fact the whole fleet finished so close proved that we had sailed well and spirits were high as a result. The racing had never been so close, so close that we had to wait in line to dock to our team music.

Although the team were tired, they were determined to push to the end and the final leg felt different. On the overall leaderboard, we were just one point behind Scallywag and we wanted to change that. Dr. Paulo Mirpuri was with us for the leg as our VIP guest so that he could have a true Volvo Ocean Race sailing experience. The leg went first to Norway before going to a turning mark in Aarhus, Denmark, then sailing back to Norway before turning towards the finish line in Den Haag. As expected by now, the racing was close. It was a windward leeward course with winds ranging from 2 knots to 32 knots with a sea state to match.

The fleet were tight until the final section when a tactical choice was required. It was another TSS forcing a decision and we elected to take the inside route along the coastline. We joined Dongfeng and Scallywag as we sailed along the beach to Holland but were not sure where we would be in relation to the rest of the fleet, who had opted for the outer route.

We called Dongfeng as the winners 12 hours ahead of the finish line, but still didn't know what position we would take. As it happens, 5th place had kindly kept the seat warm for us again and Scallywag and Vestas came in behind us. We were nothing if not consistent and claimed our all too familiar 5th place on elapsed time overall.

At the start of the project I set out my goals and hopes for this campaign. I wanted to see ongoing improvement on each leg and believe we achieved this. These boats were racing harder and faster than ever before and we were in the thick of it. I wanted our team to have open and honest communication and we certainly tried our best at that.

Confronting and dealing with issues head on is not always easy or comfortable but is better in the long run. Finally, I wanted my crew to walk away from the project with a smile on their faces at the end of the most demanding, exhilarating and best year of their life.

Off the race course, there have been numerous success stories and we have been overwhelmed by the support of our dedicated and enthusiastic fans. My role as an Ocean Ambassador and being able to speak at Ocean Summits hosted at stopovers has been a privilege. We are hugely grateful to the Mirpuri Foundation, Ocean Family Foundation, and Sky Ocean Rescue whose belief in our team and dedication to the issue of ocean health have allowed us to take part in the race and spread such an important message across the globe.

Although we have been away for the best part of a year, we are aware that reducing or eliminating single use plastic has become a hot topic with action being taken at many levels. If we have added to the momentum that is encouraging people to reduce or eliminate single use plastic, then we can walk away with our heads held high.

Now, I just want to do it again. Every mistake is a lesson learnt and I know I can go out there and do it better. Of course, it is now just the small matter of finding partners and funds to put the Volvo Ocean Race 2021/22 dream in motion.

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[Race details](#) – [Tracker](#) – [Scoreboard](#) – [Race route](#) – [Facebook](#) – [YouTube](#)

#### **Volvo Ocean Race Overall Results (after 11 of 11 legs)**

1. Dongfeng Race Team (CHN), Charles Caudrelier (FRA), 73 points
2. MAPFRE (ESP), Xabi Fernández (ESP), 70
3. Team Brunel (NED), Bouwe Bekking (NED), 69
4. Team AkzoNobel (NED), Simeon Tienpont (NED), 59
5. Vestas 11th Hour Racing (DEN/USA), Charlie Enright (USA), 39
6. Turn the Tide on Plastic (POR), Dee Caffari (GBR), 32
7. Team Sun Hung Kai/Scallywag (HKG), David Witt (AUS), 32

#### **In-Port Race Series Overall Results (after 11 of 11 races)**

1. MAPFRE (ESP), Xabi Fernández (ESP), 64 points
2. Dongfeng Race Team (CHN), Charles Caudrelier (FRA), 56
3. Team Brunel (NED), Bouwe Bekking (NED), 50
4. Team AkzoNobel (NED), Simeon Tienpont (NED), 50
5. Vestas 11th Hour Racing (DEN/USA), Charlie Enright (USA), 35
6. Turn the Tide on Plastic (POR), Dee Caffari (GBR), 25
7. Team Sun Hung Kai/Scallywag (HKG), David Witt (AUS), 25

#### **2017-18 Edition: Entered Teams – Skippers**

- [Team AkzoNobel \(NED\)](#), Simeon Tienpont (NED)
- [Dongfeng Race Team \(CHN\)](#), Charles Caudrelier (FRA)
- [MAPFRE \(ESP\)](#), Xabi Fernández (ESP)
- [Vestas 11th Hour Racing \(DEN/USA\)](#), Charlie Enright (USA)
- [Team Sun Hung Kai/Scallywag \(HKG\)](#), David Witt (AUS)
- [Turn the Tide on Plastic \(POR\)](#), Dee Caffari (GBR)
- [Team Brunel \(NED\)](#), Bouwe Bekking (NED)

**Background:** Racing the one design Volvo Ocean 65, the 2017-18 Volvo Ocean Race begins in Alicante, Spain on October 22 2017 with the final finish in The Hague, Netherlands on June 30 2018. In total, the 11-leg race will visit 12 cities in six continents: Alicante, Lisbon, Cape Town, Melbourne, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Auckland, Itajaí, Newport, Cardiff, Gothenburg, and The Hague. A maximum of eight teams will compete.