

OUT OF THE RACE, BUT SOLO SAILOR REFUSES TO BE BEAT

STORY BY LEE TOLLIVER – PHOTOS BY MORT FRYMAN – VIRGINIAN PILOT



NORFOLK — His equipment failed. He was robbed. He broke fingers and got food poisoning.

Alone at sea around Christmas, he learned that his wife had breast cancer.

But Graham Dalton didn't quit.

He arrived in Norfolk early Wednesday to conclude the second leg of the Velux 5 Oceans sailboat race. And for the first time in a long while, Dalton managed to smile.

The 54-year-old New Zealander has been disqualified from the solo, around-the-world race for not making it to Norfolk within a week of the final leg's official start.

But he vowed during a small Waterside Marina celebration to press on regardless. At the root of such determination is the memory of his son Tony, who died in December 2005 from a highly aggressive form of cancer. Tony was 22.

Dalton decided soon after his son's death that he would continue with plans for his second attempt to sail solo around the world. His first, in the 2002-03 Around Alone, ended when his boat lost its mast near the Falkland Islands.

'You can't do a sail like this for somebody else,' Dalton said. 'What you can do is use it for motivation.'

'Tony's death certainly is a great motivation.'

By the time Dalton leaves Norfolk in about a week, overall race leader Bernard Stamm already will have won his second 'around alone' competition.

'It's a severe kick, being put out of the race,' Dalton said, his eyes half shut from exhaustion. 'But it's something I can't change at this point.'

'I have to move on.'



Exhausted, Graham Dalton talks about his voyage to Lee Tolliver.

Dalton, who has worked as a sailmaker and a journalist, found himself in trouble even before the race's start.

His boat had been shipped to Savannah, Ga., where he would begin a mandatory qualifying run to the start-finish line in Bilbao, Spain.

But just a day into the sail, he was forced to re-route to Norfolk because of a tropical storm. The extra time caused a late arrival in Spain and a delay in starting the race.

Shortly after the Velux's October sendoff, Dalton had to return to port when a hurricane-like storm nearly destroyed his boat.

When he returned to sea, he learned in an e-mail that his wife, Robbie, had been diagnosed with breast cancer.

'During a race like this, you are constantly making life-and-death decisions,' Dalton said. 'We were sailing in an environment that was horrendous. So I put her news under that umbrella of everything else.'

That changed when he caught up with her for the race's first layover in Fremantle, Australia.

'She had told me she had bad news with a good ending,' Dalton said.

‘Everything was OK, they got it all, and she was home free.’

On the leg from Australia to Norfolk, equipment failures and breakdowns became commonplace.

A fuel tank used to power a generator and water maker sprung a leak. The fuel ruined his food supply. Dalton broke two fingers fixing steering problems while rounding the southernmost tip of South America.

A piece of equipment that holds the top of the mainsail to the mast exploded into bits.

His boat limped into the Falkland Islands for more repairs.

‘It’s easy to blame performance on gear and come up with excuses,’ Dalton said. ‘I wasn’t about to do that’.



‘A Southern Man – AGD’ safely alongside at Norfolk, Virginia

But coming into the Falklands was worrisome. The waters are filled with old mines. You see a lot of three legged horses from mines that have washed ashore.’

Back under way, Dalton had more steering issues, then a faulty autopilot. On his way into a Brazilian port to fix the problems, the keel bulb on the bottom of the boat fell off.

He was charged about \$35,000 for repairs he said should have cost more like \$12,000. “But you’re in a strange port and you know nobody,” Dalton said. “What can you do?” While in Brazil, he was robbed of his clothes and electronics. Back on his way to Norfolk, he ran into a storm with 50-knot winds. His autopilot again failed. The winds shredded one of his sails. He rode out the storm in Bermuda.

For each nonscheduled stop, he was penalized 48 hours in the overall standings.

Winning was no longer a thought.

Finishing was.

Jim Dixon, who splits time between residences on the Eastern Shore and in Norfolk, became close to Dalton during his first stay last year. The two stayed in touch by e-mail.

Dixon spearheaded the volunteer group that helped with the race's Norfolk layover.

He had been especially eager for Dalton's arrival.

So Dixon and several others met Dalton Wednesday morning when he crossed the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay just before dusk.

'I've got a bunch of his clothes that his wife shipped to me and lots electronics,' Dixon said. 'We're bringing in people to help with the boat, and we're going to yank it out of the water and inspect it.'

'We're going to get him ready for the final leg.'

Since Dalton basically began his journey in Norfolk, he already has officially circumnavigated the globe alone. He easily could say he has honored his son and simply call it quits. But the race started in Spain, so he's determined to push onward. 'We will finish the course,' Dalton said. 'There is no disgrace in failure. There is much disgrace in not trying'.

As I put this edition of 'A Brush with Sail' together, Graham Dalton and 'A Southern Man – AGD' are in mid-Atlantic, heading to Balboa and the completion of their gallant journey of remembrance.

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I wish to thank the editorial management of the **VIRGINIAN-PILOT** newspaper for their kind permission to reprint their story by LEE TOLLIVER and their three images by MORT FRYMAN. www.hamptonroads.com/pilotonline/

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THINGS ARE JUST OK FOR JORGEN!



Denmark's Jorgen Lindhartsen has leapt to number one in the International OK Dinghy class rankings! So? Is that a big deal?

Well yes it is. Being 'numero uno' on any International class ranking is a big deal on it's own. But, if your sixty-something and competing in a 'young man's' class, it's downright brilliant!

But wait, there's more. How about if the sixty-something guy is coming back from a back operation?

Well, all you sailors in your forties and fifties who gave up dinghy racing to stick your legs out under the life lines of a trailer or keel yacht, feel Embarrassed?

The class is in great shape because of Jorgen. No one else in the class, dare give up racing while he continues to lift the allowable retirement age to race this lovely little single-hander.

With the OK Class world championship regatta timed for late July in Poland, interest is building and many other top ranked sailors in the class will be out to take the top spot off the amazing Dane. Dynamic Englishman Nick Craig will be one who wants the top spot back but he will have to join the fairly long line

of southern hemisphere sailors and Scandinavian's who are very focused on the same goal.

'A Brush with Sail' will bring you all the news as it happens, so stay tuned.

Int.OK Rankings

- 1 Jorgen Lindhardtson DEN 926.03 14
- 2 Steve McDowell NZL 871.91 7
- 3 Nick Craig GBR 843.35 9
- 4 Roger Blassé AUS 814.22 5
- 5 Greg Wilcox NZL 813.15 11
- 6 Mark Perrow NZL 786.68 8
- 7 Alistair Deaves NZL 759.76 8
- 8 Karl Purdie NZL 739.30 6
- 9 Jesper Petersen DEN 739.12 10
- 10 Andre Blasse AUS 733.57 7
- 11 Terry Curtis GBR 691.21 7
- 12 Robert Deaves GBR 677.66 7
- 13 Russell Wood NZL 668.86 6
- 14 Hans Elkjaer SWE 613.27 9
- 15 Jon Fish GBR 613.23 8
- 16 Thomas Hanson-Mild SWE 609.76 8
- 17 Mike Williams AUS 605.70 4
- 18 Peter Horne AUS 597.36 4
- 19 Mogens Johansen DEN 563.95 10
- 20 Joe Porebski NZL 561.04 6



Thomas Hansson-Mild, Nick Craig and Thomacs Gal.

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'Sheet 'em in Lads' (J Class Ranger 1937). Oil on canvas board. © Jim Bolland.

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