

Dragon Boat stalwarts **Rachel Smith** and **Lin Griesel** are turning their attention to training for their biggest race to date – the Atlantic Rowing Challenge – to raise money for Breast Cancer Care. Images by Amy Neal of the Splash News Agency.

Dragon Boaters

In Charity Rowing Challenge



Going backwards is a new thing for us. For most of our watery past as dragon boat racers – fairly successful ones at that, with 34 World and European medals between us – we've faced forwards and paddled on one side. It's not a comfortable way to travel, but the racing is thrilling and we loved it.

But on a dismal November day in 2004, all was set to change as the decision was made – with no alcohol involved – to sign up for the 2007 Atlantic Rowing Race. Not satisfied with the £50k it cost to take part, we upped the challenge to raise £100k more for Breast Cancer Care.

Following in the footsteps of our team-mate Debra Searle (nee Veal), we launched our campaign on a fabulous spring evening in April 2005 with our first rowing lesson – Lin at Walbrook RC in Teddington and Rachel at Royal

Chester RC. We loved it. Since then we've both rowed and sculled – in eights, fours, doubles and singles. As we understand it, this isn't common practice, but our paddling history has

oarswomen, there's a host of other training to complete and the physical side is just one part of it.

While we're both out on the water whenever possible, the ergo has become a regular part of

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instilled a deep knowledge of how boats and blades move through the water and we took to this discipline like ducks to water.

The Race starts in December and preparations are well underway. As well as becoming competent

our day and we're mixing shorter interval type sessions with long, steady-state rowing. Both of us are able to complete two hours on the ergo and will be completing our first 24-hour row at Easter, based on a two hours on / two hours off schedule.

The team will be at Henley Women's Regatta, with their boat, where they'll be talking to visitors about the Challenge. To find out more and make a donation, visit www.atlanticrowingchallenge.co.uk



Over the last 12 months we've completed our Shorebased Ocean Yachtmaster – this can take several months, but we had five days. Compulsory courses also include Sea First Aid, Sea Survival and a Marine Short Wave (VHF) Radio licence, so it's pretty full-on.

We're also working with a motivational coach, ensuring that our goals and values complement each other. This should help avoid some of the conflict seen during the Cracknell & Fogle crossing. Our coach is also helping us develop metaphors and find out what our deep-seated motivators are – the things that will really make the difference when it comes to the crunch.

We both have old injuries that niggle so we have a couple of physiotherapists advising and treating us in the run-up to the Race. Both are experts in dealing with typical rowing and paddling injuries.

We also have help from a nutritionist, a luxury we haven't had before. The aim of this is to get us to the startline in the best possible shape – and it's been an interesting experience. Both of

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us have different targets here, so we've adjusted our diets to help meet them. One of the biggest challenges during the Race will be consuming up to 8,000 calories every day and coping with two to three stone of weight loss.

Finally we have each other and a vast experience of racing at the highest level to draw upon. We know that we have the mental capacity to deal with the array of emotions that the Challenge will bring. From fear to elation, we'll go through it all. We've also got plenty of ways to help each other make it all the way, little things that we used in our races. Techniques to calm us, and motivators to drive us on when it really counts.

Without the dragon boat racing experience, you'd have to question whether we would even attempt this endeavor. But with all that behind us, we know that if we dream it, we can do it. ■



Rachel Smith

Age: 37

Rowing Club: Royal Chester.

Greatest sporting achievement: Winning Gold at the 2003 World Dragon Boat Racing Championship and setting a new 1,000m World Record.

Favourite saying: "If not now, then when? If not you, then who?"

Most looking forward to: Dolphins, sunrises and sunsets.

Biggest fear: Spiders. But the boat will be a spider-free zone.

Lin Griesel

Age: 41

Rowing Club: Walbrook

Greatest sporting achievement: Winning two Gold medals at the 2002 European Dragon Boat Racing Championships in Poland and setting a new 1,000m World Record.

Favourite saying: "The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do."

Most looking forward to: Real darkness and the feeling when we reach Antigua.

Biggest fear: Not making the fundraising target.