****

9B21C020

Tracy Edwards and *Maiden* (A): Background

Tracy Edwards, Gerard Seijts, and Ann Frost wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

This publication may not be transmitted, photocopied, digitized, or otherwise reproduced in any form or by any means without the permission of the copyright holder. Reproduction of this material is not covered under authorization by any reproduction rights organization. To order copies or request permission to reproduce materials, contact Ivey Publishing, Ivey Business School, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada, N6G 0N1; (t) 519.661.3208; (e) cases@ivey.ca; www.iveycases.com. Our goal is to publish materials of the highest quality; submit any errata to publishcases@ivey.ca. i1v2e5y5pubs

Copyright © 2021, Ivey Business School Foundation Version: 2021-06-22

In 1989, *Maiden* was the first boat to enter the Whitbread Round the World Race with an all-female crew. As its name suggested, the yachting race had crews racing around the world, over more than 59,000 often-gruelling kilometres (32,000 nautical miles). Begun in 1972 and originally sponsored by the UK brewing company Whitbread Plc, the race was known as the toughest test of a team in sport. The race typically left Europe in the fall and returned the following spring, with ports of call that varied with each edition of the race. Until the 1989 edition, all previous entries had been male skippered and overwhelmingly male crewed; only a handful of women had ever participated in the race, and those who had had served as cooks. The skipper of *Maiden*, the first all-female boat, was Tracy Edwards, who was not only the skipper but was also the navigator and the impetus behind the entire venture.

*Maiden* finished the 1989 edition of the Whitbread second in its class, having won two of the six legs of the race. This was the best finish ever for an English boat in the history of the race (an achievement that still stood in 2021). Over the course of the nine-month race, news of the all-female boat travelled widely, and support for *Maiden* and her female crew spread like wildfire. In port after port, the women were greeted by thousands of sailing fans—not just girls and women, but sailing fans of all types. Edwards was named 1990 Yachtsman of the Year (the first woman to win this award) and was awarded a Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for her contributions to sailing and sport.

However, the story of *Maiden* and Edwards was not at all straightforward. It was filled with lessons about resilience, teamwork, decision making, grit, character, candour, and leadership.

Edwards grew up in the south of England in a middle-class family of four, with two parents and a younger brother, Trevor. Her father, Tony, owned a high-fidelity (hi-fi) stereo business and her mother, Pat, a dancer and actor, worked alongside Tony as the business manager. All was relatively uneventful in Edwards’s life until her father died suddenly of a heart attack when she was 10. At that point, her life was upended. Not only did her mother remarry a few years later, but the family then picked up and moved to Wales. Edwards attended a series of schools during this period: first a boarding school specializing in the dramatic arts, as Edwards thought she would be an actor, and then the local comprehensive school, once the family had relocated to Wales. Edwards hated it—all of it: her new stepfather, her new school, her new circumstances. And her anger and behaviour made this quite clear. She acted out, she rebelled, and she could not settle. At 15, Edwards’s last school expelled her and asked her not to come back.

Edwards drifted over the next year, beginning secretarial college. Eventually, Pat took her aside and told her she thought it would be a good idea if she headed out to find out what she *did* like to do—because being well behaved and getting an education were clearly not things she enjoyed. So in 1979, Edwards packed up a few things and headed to Greece with her then-boyfriend. With only £30[[1]](#footnote-1) in her back pocket, she needed to work, so she set herself up shortly after arriving by working as a waitress and later in a bar. Soon, Edwards was employed as a cook and stewardess on yachts plying the luxury cruising market in the Mediterranean.

Eventually, Edwards discovered off-shore sailing and joined the set of young, itinerant travellers who worked on these boats. She had found her people. For two seasons, Edwards worked on yachts in the Mediterranean and Indian oceans, and at the end of 1982, she got herself a job doing boat delivery—sailing yachts from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean in the off season. This open-ocean sailing was a new thing, and she loved it.

It was during this period of ocean sailing that Edwards began to learn seamanship—the art of sailing—and eventually, the art of navigation. On an Atlantic crossing, where Edwards was employed as cook, the navigator of the boat took her aside and asked if she could navigate; the answer was no. Unwilling to risk the crew’s lives by not having someone available to navigate if something were to happen to him, the navigator took it upon himself to teach Edwards how to navigate. She took to it quickly and easily; unlike school math, this was something mathematical that she both enjoyed and was good at.

By 1985, Edwards was thoroughly immersed in the ocean-going yacht racing community. She became enthralled by the notion of the Whitbread Round the World Race and set her sights on getting a place on one of these boats. In 1985, four women—of a total of over 200 participants—would race the Whitbread. All four were employed as cooks, and Edwards was one of them. She initially had a place on the yacht *Norsk Data GB*, but when it became clear that its crew were not going to be serious contenders, Edwards left the boat in Cape Town and joined *Atlantic Privateer*—a more serious boat, but one with an atrocious reputation for male chauvinism. In fact, the skipper of *Atlantic Privateer* initially resisted the idea of Edwards joining the team, saying that it was “absolutely not happening. Girls are for shagging when we get into port.”[[2]](#footnote-2) She got the job only because she went directly to the yacht’s owner. This would be Edwards’s introduction to Whitbread racing.

With this introduction and ultimate trial by fire behind her, Edwards left the 1985–86 edition of the Whitbread with the idea to mount an all-female-crewed boat in the next edition of the race, the 1989 Whitbread. She knew, after her 1985 experience, that the only way women would be taken seriously as sailors and have any say in how a boat was raced would be to have their own boat. So Edwards set out to do just that—to find a boat, assemble a crew, and raise the necessary millions in funding. How does a 24-year-old high-school dropout, with relatively little open-ocean sailing experience and no connections to wealth or corporate sponsors, manage to do all this? Where should she even start?

1. £ = GBP = Great Britain pound; £1 = US$1.574 in 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mary Alice Miller, “The King, the Sailor, and the Open Sea: The Remarkable True Story of *Maiden*,” *Vanity Fair*, June 27, 2019, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/06/maiden-documentary-tracy-edwards-sailing-interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)