

Dear Janet,

Thank you so much for your support for me to participate in the 2009 Tall Ships Race. I had an absolutely amazing time! It's very hard to pinpoint exactly what made it so good, but I'll give it a go.

To begin with the people were amazing. There were 9 young members of crew of which I was one. We all came from completely different backgrounds and parts of the country, with seemingly nothing in common except for a desire to sail this rather small boat across the Baltic ... but we got on like a house on fire! By the end of the voyage I felt I really knew every single crew-member on that boat. We worked really well as a team – the 3 older watch leaders and the skipper instructed us on how to sail the boat, and told us what needed doing and when, but apart from that it was us sailing the boat.

That leads me on to the actual sailing, which was fantastic. It started with the parade of sail in Gdynia (Poland), where all 98 boats in the race sail a few miles up the coast in a specific formation, with full sails up – it's a spectacular sight. Here are a few pictures that I got though they don't really do it justice... it's hard to capture how amazing it is being out there in amongst all of this.



This is the view a head of us in the parade of sail. In theory, each large square rigged boat had 3 smaller boats (like us) in formation alongside it. In practice, it was an amazing feat of disorganisation and chaos!! We did manage to find the large boat we were with however, she was called Thalassa and was very lovely.

Thalassa didn't quite compare to the amazing square rigger behind us that you can see in these photos. She is owned by the Polish company Sovcomflot.



After the parade of sail we all headed for the start line which was 17 miles offshore. The skipper had the start all planned out. We sailed to a point a little further up wind than the line and went hove to. We were to hold our position there, and then 2 minutes before the start, readjust the sails and head for the line. Unfortunately things never go as planned. The first part worked fine, and we were sat in an ideal position 10 mins before the start. From this point we were able to watch the large square riggers do their earlier start which was an amazing sight.



But, at 5 mins before the start one of our rivals sailed passed carrying a larger headsail than us. This caused chaos. We had 3 main rivals in the race- the other small English vessels... John Laing, Black Diamond of Durham, and most of all Offshore Scout, our sister boat and mortal enemy. It was John Laing who sailed passed us on the start, and the fact that her headsail was larger than ours made the skipper notice the calm that was approaching across the water from the startline. He decided that we needed the larger sail up, even if it meant we were late for the start, so a team of us ran to the fore deck for the most manic and rushed sail change I had ever done. (Little did I know that it was only to be the first of many 😊.) The result was that we crossed the start line a few minutes late, which was frustrating, but our larger headsail allowed us to soon gain on the smaller boats ahead.

We then settled down into a regular pattern of sailing which continued for around 5 days. We were divided into 3 watches, with 3 crew and 1 watch leader in each. In these watches we were on deck for 2 hours and off watch for 4 hours constantly throughout day and night. Again it's very hard to explain the appeal of getting up at 2am to sit on deck in the middle of the freezing cold Baltic, but great company, stunning sunrises and sunsets, and a fervent desire to win the race, certainly contributed.



This is Jamie, Jen and Liam, on the midnight till 2am watch, and a stunning sunset on the first night.



So life went on like this for days, with watches changing every 2 hours, and sails needing changing all the time. Also we had to take it in turns to cook, which resulted

in something of a food competition, and believe me, making canapés and fruit punch in a galley that is 2 feet by 4 feet and is rolling around in the waves isn't easy!

Anyway, as a result of our efforts on deck, we gradually improved in our placing in the race. In the category for boats our size we went from 22nd out of 40 up to 8th, and we were beating Offshore Scout and Black Diamond! But 25 miles off the finish line (this sounds a lot but it isn't in a 500 mile race) everything went wrong. We managed to rip the large headsail so had to swap to the smaller one, but had to tack to pass a lighthouse that was acting as a waymark while we were still trying to pack away the torn sail. As a result we left the sail locker open and guess what? ... the new sail we'd put up got caught on it and very nearly ripped. Then just as it was looking as if things couldn't get much worse, the heavens opened and a hail storm began, accompanied by a crazy amount of wind (it was force 8 gusting at 9 I think). So, we battled this wind for 6 hours without gaining 1 mile, and it was at this point that the skipper decreed that the mast wouldn't take it, and that we'd better retire from the race and motor. We were gutted at the time, as John Laing was far enough ahead to have just missed the storm, and Black Diamond was so far behind, that they missed it too, and it had blown out by the time they neared the finish.

So it was very nearly a sad end to the trip... motoring in to St Petersburg was not what any of us wanted to do. But we were lucky on two fronts. Firstly, Offshore Scout, we discovered, had retired from the race several days earlier than us, so we still beat her, and even more importantly, the wind finally died down so we were able to



enter St Petersburg under full sail. This was fantastic. We sailed up the river at 6 am local time and the sun was rising over the amazing gold domes of the cathedrals and churches.

I have just realised quite how much I have rambled on, so I wont go into detail of our time in St Petersburg. I will just assure you that it was amazing. There was a Tall Ships festival, and a beach party, and a crew parade, and fire eaters, and showers, which were possible the best thing of all after a week at sea with no washing facilities.

Basically, I could write pages and pages, and still only have brushed the surface, both about the race, and St Petersburg, and of course Gydinia, which I now realise I have missed out entirely. But you get the gist... I had an absolutely fantastic time, and I am really grateful for your help and support.

Thanks again
Annie Scott

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annie Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.