

# Challenge Wales

## Tall ships race from Turku to Klaipeda by Alaric Bates

We arrived late on Saturday after a day of travelling from London to Turku (Finland). Here we met the rest of the crew, unpacked, claimed beds and went to explore the festival. The boat was moored right in the centre of the city and we were surrounded in ships ranging from giant 4 masted tall ships with crews of over 100 to much smaller 40ft yachts with crews of 8.

The next day we were given a tour of the boat and shown the correct techniques on how to use the winches, etc correctly. It was then a quick lunch before joining the parade of sail. This involved sailing out of Turku and through the archipelago that surrounds it with the rest of the tall ship fleet and a huge flotilla of spectator boats. As we left the quaysides and beaches were packed with onlookers. We then sailed to a quiet sheltered island where we tied up next to a Dutch tall ship on a ferry quay for the night.

We woke up early the next day and left for the start line. The water was glassy as we motored past the final islands towards the two naval ships marking the start line. After lunch the wind started to build and as the first set of square riggers started the wind was at a comfortable 15knts. We were sailing in class C meaning that we were in the third start. This allowed us to watch the larger ships start before starting ourselves.

The next 36 hours went in a blur of sleeping and sailing as we raced towards Gotland passing tall ships as we went. The watches ran in a 4 hrs on and 4hrs off during the day time and 3hrs on/off during the night, although the night watches seemed longer. The beginning of the race was fairly simple as the boat raced downwind with the Yankee poled out on the windward side for the majority of the day. A couple of gybes and 24hrs later we arrived at the bottom point of Gotland and discovered that through the night and the morning we had managed to push ourselves to the front of the fleet. A quick(ish) sail change later and we were heading east on the final stretch to Klaipeda. This new course was much more favourable for the boat (average speed of more than 10knts) but had the downside that our

world was now on a 40 degree angle and fell of 2m waves every so often. Up on deck it was now much colder and wetter as waves where breaking over the bow and came running back the whole length of the boat.

12hrs later we crossed the finish line just as the sun was rising. We were the 4th boat to finish the race but because of handicap ended up further down in our class. After mooring up in Klaipeda we had a large breakfast (majority of the crew hadn't had dinner) and went to bed. As we had such a quick crossing we arrived as the event was still being set up but in the afternoon we had a well needed shower and went to explore the city. In the evening we met up again with the crew and had a meal ashore with each everyone.

The next few days were mainly spent catching up with sleep, exploring the city and the beach as the rest of the fleet arrived. On Thursday night we went ice skating with a German crew that we had made friends with. On Sunday we took part in the crew activitys on the beach in the morning before the crew parade which took us through the streets of Klaipeda dressed up as dragons and daffodils. In the evening there was the crew party which allowed us to socialise/meet crews from some of the larger boats. Afterwards I quickly packed and grabbed some sleep as I had to leave at 6:30 in the morning to catch my flight.

I would like to say thank you for the bursary as it has allowed me to experience sailing on a larger boat and to sail alongside some of the largest sailing boats in the world. It is an experience that I will never forget and one that I hope to be able to do again at some point.



