

SURREY WOMAN SET TO BE YOUNGEST FEMALE SKIPPER IN CLIPPER ROUND THE WORLD YACHT RACE HISTORY

Nicola 'Nikki' Henderson, 23, from Guilford, Surrey, is set to make history after being selected as the youngest ever professional Skipper to lead a team in the 40,000-nautical mile Clipper Round the World Yacht Race.

Born on 26 July, 1993, Nikki will have just turned 24 when the 2017-18 edition of the Clipper Race sets sail this August. She takes over the 'youngest Skipper' title from Alex Thomson who proved youth was no barrier to success when he won the Clipper 1997-98 Race at age 26. Alex has gone onto an impressive professional ocean racing career and was recently the runner-up in the solo Vendee Globe.

On her appointment, Nikki said: "It feels great, I hope I can be an inspiration to other young people, especially young women, to go and achieve what they set out to, to push boundaries and go get what they want if they put their minds to it and work hard."

Sailing with family and friends since the age of 13, the idea of being able to work at sea was planted after a short stint in the Sea Cadets. Nicola has since carved a successful sailing career, in both racing and instructing which would rival those twice her age.

On feeling any added pressure, she says: "There is pressure for all of us to perform, but I am confident in my experience skill level and maturity."

Since 2006, Nikki has sailed 38,000 miles during which she has skippered three ARC races across the Atlantic (twice winning the Youngest Skipper Award), the Caribbean 600 - an inshore race circuit, two Cowes Weeks, and sailed over 10,000 miles in offshore deliveries. As an RYA instructor for over three years she has already taught over 200 students and also launched a Sailing and Watersports centre in Denver, Colorado.

Though excited for all that lies ahead, when asked what she is most looking forward to she divulged: "The Pacific Ocean will be one of the most extreme mental and physical challenge my crew and I will face, the harder we push ourselves the greater the reward. The sense of achievement at the end will be lifechanging."

Of the twelve selected Skippers, Nikki is one of two females, the other being Wendy Tuck, 52, from Australia, who also competed in the last edition of the Clipper Race. There are eight other British Skippers, who are; Rob Graham from West Sussex; Andy Burns from Skegness, Lincolnshire; former Royal Marine Lance Shepherd, from Blackpool; Conall Morrison from Derry-Londonderry; Rick Powell from Devon, former Superintendent David Hartshorn from Chepstow, North Wales; Tristan Brooks from Bangor; and Roy Taylor, a former RAF officer from South Yorkshire. On the international side, Gaetan Thomas will be the race's first Belgian Skipper, and Chris Kobusch, is from Germany.

The Clipper Race is one of the world's toughest endurance challenges. 40,000 nautical miles long, taking almost a year to complete, this is the only event which gives amateur sailors the chance to sail around the world, taking on Mother Nature's harshest conditions. Fewer people have completed the Clipper Race than have climbed Mount Everest.

The Clipper Race is the brainchild of Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, the first person to sail solo non-stop around the world in 1968-69. This momentous biennial event has a deep passion for challenge and life changing adventure at its core. Since the first Clipper Race in 1996, almost 5,000 people have been turned into competent ocean racers.

Sir Robin said: "The role of Clipper Race Skipper is one of the toughest, but most rewarding jobs that exists in sailing. Not only do you have to be a highly capable sailor to be able to complete the relentless challenge of circumnavigation, you also have to be an excellent instructor and leader.

"Nikki has vast experience in offshore ocean racing and has impressed us all the way through her selection process. It is great to see such an accomplished female Skipper pursuing a competitive offshore career and I wish her, and all our professional Skippers the very best in the race."

All Skippers are now working full-time at the Clipper Race HQ in Gosport, Hampshire, where they will remain, leading crew training and making necessary race preparations.

The next major event in the race preparations is Crew Allocation, at Portsmouth Guildhall, May 20, where all Skippers and crew will be assigned to their teams for the first time.

The Clipper 2017-18 Race sets sail in August and will see teams first race across the Atlantic to South America; the South Atlantic to Cape Town, South Africa; across the Southern Ocean's Roaring Forties to Western Australia; around to East Australia taking in the famous Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race en route; back into the Northern Hemisphere to Qingdao, China via Sanya; across the mighty North Pacific to West Coast USA; to New York via the famous Panama Canal; and then a final Atlantic crossing before arriving back to the UK in Summer 2018.

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To download high-res images and videos of the skippers, please register for free, immediate access to our media portal at <http://mediaportal.clipperroundtheworld.com/auth/login>

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About Clipper Round the World Yacht Race

The Clipper Round the World Yacht Race is the world's largest ocean race and is also regarded as one of the toughest endurance challenges on the planet. At 40,000 nautical miles long and taking almost a year to complete, it consists of twelve teams competing against each other on the world's largest matched fleet of 70-foot ocean racing yachts.

The Clipper Race was established in 1996 by Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, the first person to sail solo non-stop around the world in 1968-69. His aim was to allow anyone, regardless of previous sailing experience, the chance to embrace the thrill of ocean racing; it is the only event of its kind for amateur sailors. Around 40 per cent of crew are novices and have never sailed before starting a comprehensive training programme ahead of their adventure.

This unique challenge brings together everyone from chief executives to taxi drivers, nurses and firefighters, farmers, airline pilots and students, from age 18 upwards, to take on Mother Nature's toughest conditions. There is no upper age limit, the oldest competitor to date is 74.

Whether they choose to take on the whole circumnavigation or compete in one or more of eight individual legs, all our crew achieve something remarkable as they conquer some of the world's most challenging oceans.

The overall route is split into a series of global races and a maximum 12 points going to first place ascending to 1 point for twelfth place. The team with the highest cumulative points at the end of the final race wins the series, and the Clipper Race trophy.

The next edition of the race is due to start in August 2017. For more information, go to: www.clipperroundtheworld.com