

Alan's adventure of a lifetime

Launch day nears for solo sailor's round the world voyage

By Matt Westcott

A first impression of Alan Paris doesn't conjure up the image of a daredevil.

Polite, softly spoken and with not a hair out of place, the former manager of Ariel Sands does not fit the description of your average adventurer.

But, as the saying goes, you should never judge a book by its cover.

Paris warrants the moniker just as much as your Sir Edmund Hillarys or your Sir Ranolph Fiennes. Anyone who plans to sail single-handed around the world in a piece of Kevlar surely does.

Six years in the planning, Paris' dream of taking part in the Around Alone sailing race is nearing fruition.

The event starts in September and the skipper cannot wait for the adventure to begin.

"I never wanted to follow the standard path in anything in life. I have always tried very hard, but it hasn't been the winning, it's been the competing," said Paris when asked what makes one want to tackle such an arduous trek.

"I guess it's the drive to take part. I'm not really doing this for anybody . . . the drive just comes from the adventure."

In the next fortnight the yacht, named *BTC Velocity* after its primary sponsor, will take to the water for the first time.

"The boat is being launched on August 15 in Brisbane, Australia, where the sea trials are going to take place," Paris said. "That is where we test the boat and make sure it floats and that all the communications equipment, the computers, auto pilot, water maker, ballast system, sail handling are in order. We also have to calibrate the electronics and work out the boat's performance data."

Paris said the boat would undergo a significant test but it would not be taken to the limit.

"The only way to test it to the limit is to go into the southern oceans and play in 60 mile per hour winds and I don't think you do that on purpose," he said. "But you make sure the design, which started a year and a half ago, has made it past the drawing board, into the builder's yard and into the finished product."

"When you have a finished product you can test it and push things and certainly if something is not strong enough it will break in these tests."

Paris will spend two weeks with the builder before taking the yacht on its maiden journey – a

450-mile trip to Sydney. If all goes to plan, the next stage is checking his own seaworthiness.

"I have hired a coach called David Adams. He won Class II, which is the 40 to 50ft class, in the 1994 race and is one of my sailing heroes," Paris said. "I managed to tie him down as he lives in Sydney and he is going to run a solo sailing boot camp for two weeks."

"That will involve everything. For example sailing manoeuvres. I will go out and perform a jibe, a hoist or a tack and he will film and then, being Australian, when we get back to the dock he will tell me exactly what he thought of the manoeuvre."

As well as the obvious need for personal fitness, diet will also be on the agenda.

"There is a different diet for the Atlantic, carbohydrates but lower in fat, to the Southern Ocean where it is cold and you need a much higher fat content," he said. "My coach is particularly good at that so we will discuss the amount of calorie intake, for example. For the past two weeks I have been writing down everything I eat and what my weight is. He is then going to take that and work out what is my mean level of calories."

It might not be what the manager of a top hotel is used to, but Paris has been doing his best to get used to the menu he'll have to endure on the journey.

"I bought a seven day supply of freeze dried food and my wife and I ate it over a period of two weeks. Some of it was really good. Sweet and sour pork and some of the lasagnes and spaghetti were great," he said, trying hard to convince.

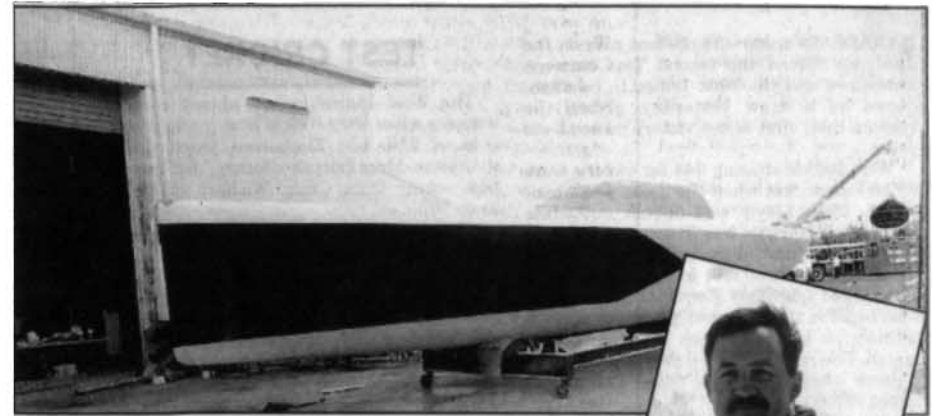
His project will cost the thick end of \$400,000, but you don't get much comfort for that.

"Nine feet long by eight feet wide is my living accommodation," Paris said. "I have seven feet of headroom which is very unusual, it's normally a lot lower than that. Everything apart from that is crawling."

Paris comes across as a man who thinks of everything, down to the very last detail. Even the decor of his living area has been considered.

"We worked on a colour scheme because I am not painting any of the boat inside – I'm saving weight because paint weighs about 30 to 40 pounds," he said.

"It will just be the centre section and we are going to do a combination of neon blue and a little



Finishing touches: The boat of Alan Paris (inset) sits in a Brisbane yard awaiting its christening later this month

yellow speck on the ceiling to give the feeling of space.

"If it was red down below I'd be an angry sailor, blue down below I'd be a sad sailor. The builder said colour was mindstate when you are in your capsule for 45 days at a time. It is something that if you have a chance to think about it you think about."

Paris' excitement about the project is palpable. "Imagine you have been thinking about something since 1995 and two weeks from now it happens," he said. "By my nature I am not an excitable person but it is something that has been a passion of mine for a long time and I've been lucky enough to be able to follow my dream."

Naturally, his loved ones are the ones he will think of most.

"I will miss my family. You are missing people and land-based things such as a bed that doesn't move when you have time for reflection," said Paris, married with a one-year-old son, Tucker. "I can't tell you when those times are going to be but they certainly will be every day. Maybe it will be when I go to sleep or first thing when I wake up, assuming I wake up and the boat is upright."

That danger is something that had to address with wife, Becky, but Paris has the answers.

"It is dangerous but you have to look at the statistics. A total of 97 people have done this race and they have covered approximately one million miles and there have been two people that have died," he said. "So that's one for every 500,000 miles and this race is 30,000 miles. There's a chance but I think in the United States if you drive 500,000 miles in your car you are a lot more likely not to make it."

While the yacht is un-insureable – "there is no insurance on the boat . . . no one will insure the boat, no way at all" – Paris' builder has done everything he can to make sure it survives the journey in one piece.

"There's five compartments and two layers of Kevlar in the boat," he said. "The Titanic was unsinkable but this boat is bullet proof – literally."

A man who oozes confidence Paris may be, but he is realistic about his chances in a race that will pit him against the best in the world.

"Success is defined as finishing. It's not winning. To win would be highly unlikely as I'm a small boat in a class of much bigger boats," he said. "Everything we have done to date is designed with finishing in mind. If there was ever a compromise to make – do we make it five percent stronger, five percent weaker? We made it 10 percent stronger."

"Apart from the whales, the icebergs, containers and the other unknown anomalies like logs out of the Amazon, I believe we are going to finish the race."

So will his wanderlust be satisfied when he eventually returns to Bermuda?

"Becky has made it clear that I have to get back to work or she and Tucker will run away and I will never find them again," Paris joked.

Readers can find out more about the adventure by logging onto www.aroundalone2002.com