



Final Leg for Plastiki - Challenging conditions ahead for boat made of bottles

The Plastiki, the Inmarsat and Stratos-sponsored catamaran made of reclaimed plastic bottles, is heading for Sydney on the final leg of its epic journey highlighting the damaging effects of waste on the world's oceans.

Expedition leader David de Rothschild and his crew now face the most challenging sections of their voyage, which began in San Francisco in March.

The Plastiki, which has so far covered more than 5,500 nautical miles, embarked on its last leg after a stop in Western Samoa for final preparations and adjustments.

Phone interviews

A Thrane & Thrane Sailor FleetBroadband terminal on board means the crew have been able to keep the expedition firmly in the public eye.

Store-and-forward video updates are transmitted regularly from the boat for media including CNN International, which is hosting a weekly news update on its website and on-air. David and the crew have also conducted many phone interviews -including The Oprah Winfrey Show.

The terminal, supplied by solutions provider SatCom, is being charged off the vessel's solar panel and two wind turbines.

Crew blogs

The crew is also keeping in touch with followers via blogs on the expedition website and on Twitter, MySpace and Facebook.

During the course of the voyage, David and his crew have witnessed at first-hand the fragility of our oceans.

He said: "When we look underneath the boat, the hull is covered in a fine, extra layer of plastic and as you run your hand across your face you see countless molecular size plastic fragments, known as mermaid's tears.

Toxic stew

"It is tragic. From above, the ocean still looks beautiful and untouched but just below the surface is this toxic stew that could quickly end up on our dinner plates.

"The issue is far more ominous than people imagine, as these commonly known 'garbage patches' are not just floating islands of trash but a swirling, poisonous soup.

"The problem is subsurface - tiny pieces of material in the process of breaking down and floating in the top layer of the ocean where most species live, feed and breed."

Recyclable material

The Plastiki, a 20-metre (60-ft) craft, has been engineered almost entirely from approximately 12,500 reclaimed plastic bottles and from Seretex, a self-reinforcing, 100 per cent recyclable material woven from plastic fibres.

So far, the boat has experienced only moderate winds, but the effect of more than 5,500 nautical miles of movement upon this largely experimental vessel, in equatorial heat, has taken a toll on its structure.

Minor reinforcements have been necessary, as the Plastiki is now venturing into an ocean area that has more dynamic weather systems.

The crew and the technical team say they have taken every precaution and have every confidence the Plastiki will rise to the challenge.

Since setting sail for Sydney from San Francisco on 20 March, the Inmarsat and Stratos sponsored Plastiki has stood up well in generally favourable conditions. But the second leg of the three-month expedition will see the crew of six dealing with stronger and more volatile winds, with the influences of low pressure areas becoming more dominant.

Useful resource

The Plastiki is the brainchild of ecologist David de Rothschild, who sees the voyage as an opportunity both to highlight the amount of plastic waste floating in the ocean and how it can be turned into a useful resource.

Ambitious messages

David has conducted many phone interviews, including one with the website Smartplanetin which he said: "Because we have all this connectivity, it allows us to be ambitious with the messages we send and the kind of content we are posting."

Innovative plastics

The 20-metre (60-ft) catamaran is built out of 12,500 drinking water bottles and harnesses innovative developments in plastics such as self-reinforcing PETa 100 per cent recyclable material woven from plastic fibres.

Since arriving in Apia, Western Samoa, the crew has been making rigorous checks of the vessel before setting out on the second leg.

Sails are being strengthened and parts of the rigging changed for a lighter material. Dagger boards, designed to help stop the vessel going sideways (crabbing) and to allow for more accurate course-keeping, are being made locally.

www.theplastiki.com

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