

Duchy's Laura aims to raise £500,000 on Pacific row

A CORNISH woman is preparing to take on a world first, by rowing 8,446 miles unsupported across the Pacific Ocean.

The 'Coxless Crew' of four girls will be led by Laura Penhaul and her rowing friend Emma Mitchell, who are being heavily backed by the Hampshire-based Crewsaver company's safety equipment. Other members of the team are still being sought, either to complete the whole voyage or to take part in one of the three legs. Penhaul hails from Cambrose, which is on the North coast of West Cornwall between Portreath and Porthowan, and she went west to college in Truro.

The 30-year-old, who now spends most of her time in London, aims to raise £500,000 for 'Walking with the Wounded' and Breast Cancer Care by rowing from America to Australia.

One of her partners in the boat will be 28-year-old former City of Bristol rower Emma Mitchell, who now lives in Marlow and rows for the Thames club.

The Gosport company, Crewsaver, have donated vital safety equipment, including a special six-man, over-24-hour ISO ocean liferaft and ErgoFit 280N lifejackets, designed specifically for use offshore, as well as numerous other accessories including safety knives and throw bags. They have also invited the girls down to the South Coast for some intense training days at Crewsaver HQ, while TeamBath's physiology team will be tracking the rowers and their performances under pressure.

Penhaul, leader of the crew, describes herself as a 'Jack of All Trades, aka Master of None' when it comes to sport, but she has already mastered a nine-hour row across the Solent to the Isle of Wight in their 29-ft pink-coloured boat, which was built by the famous Rossiter Rowing Boats company.

'I actually love all sport', she told me. 'I've run the Paris and London marathons; competed in Barcelona and Geneva triathlons; gained my first age-group win at a Marlow triathlon; been rockclimbing, and ice-climbed when I lived in Chamoix - and I just love skiing after doing two seasons in Verbier and Val d'Isere!'

She says that they are most grateful for Crewsaver's support. 'Our ErgoFit lifejackets are super comfy and most certainly make us feel much safer when going offshore', she said.

The challenge is expected to start from Long Beach, California, some time next year and could last six months. Stops will be made in Hawaii and Samoa, and Penhaul says that having the chance to swim in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, together with reaching the finishing beach in Cairns and being back in her family's arms, are the things to which she is most looking forward.

But in going to miss Auntie Marie's Cornish pasties...

jc.collings@btopenworld.com



PACIFIC POSTING: Former City of Bristol rower Emma Mitchell and Cornwall's Laura Penhaul, who will be attempting to set a World record ocean crossing next year



ROWING

by John Collings



RAZOR-SHARP ROWERS: Exeter's Senior A coxed four – Jonny Webber, Jo Thorp, Dave Ord, Paul Minchell and coxswain Emily Booter – with the impressive Wilkinson Sword Trophy they won at Wimbleball's West of England Championship regatta on Exmoor where the club's Fern Dymond, Michaela Bailey, Ruth Fray and Nic Walker were celebrating finishing ahead of the Bideford Blues and Reds fours in the Senior B event

Picture: David Godfrey



EXETER TAKE HONOURS AT WIMBLEBALL

IT was the Exmoor-based Wimbleball Rowing Club's turn to host a West of England Championship Regatta at their picturesque lake just outside of Dulverton on the Devon – Somerset border.

The upward trend in entries, evident at both the Plymouth and Totnes events, continued with more than 225 crews in action at the third Championship regatta of the season.

Racing was held over a straight, non-tidal 1,000-metre stretch of the lake, included events for Junior 13s right through the age and ability spectrum to Masters over the age of 50.

A torrential downpour 15 minutes before the start saw crews scrambling for shelter but the opening event still got away on time and after that 30-minute storm, the remainder of the programme continued in perfect conditions – sunny, with a light breeze, and flat water.

The majority of the Senior races were again dominated by the Exeter club, who took top spot in both the men's and women's Senior A and B fours, although in the battle for the 'Championship of the Lake' – awarded to the club with the highest number of points – they were pushed all the way to the finishing line by the region's other big club, Dart-Totnes.

Just two points separate them at the close of the regatta.

The Senior A coxed fours was won by the Exeter crew of Jonny Webber, Jo Thorp, Dave Ord, Paul Minchell and coxswain Emily Booter, who finished a length ahead of Dart-Totnes with Plymouth in third spot.

Victory enabled them to open up a slender two-point lead over their nearest Championship challengers



ROWING

by David Godfrey

from Plymouth, who currently have six points.

There is a similar keen contest at Senior B level, although here, the same Exeter crew remain unbeaten on nine points and head Plymouth by four points.

The women's Senior A title chase is being fought out by two crews from Exeter, with the 'A' team of Eleanor Burke, Lucinda Sanders, Katy Campbell and Becca Eastman having won both races to date, while it was another Exeter crew – Fern Dymond, Michaela Bailey, Ruth Fray and Nic Walker – who came home ahead of fours from Bideford Blues and the Reds in the Senior B race.

Exeter's third straight win in this class sees them on nine points, six ahead of Reds who have three. There was no Senior C event.

Dart-Totnes again dominated the two Junior 16 races. The girls' quad recorded their second win in three starts to head their division with eight points, two ahead of Blues while the Reds have three.

The boys' quad from Totnes have won all three of their races to date and have gained a sizeable five-point advantage on the Reds, who have four points. Dart-Totnes also head the girls' Junior 14 table with seven points, two ahead of Exeter.

● **THERE** was disappointment all round when last weekend's 28-mile Eddystone Challenge was called off because of unsuitable weather conditions.

The organisers, Mayflower Offshore Rowing Club, attempted to rescue something from the day by laying a 15-mile course inside the Breakwater, and down to the 'Twinsands' bay off Cawsand and Kingsand Bay, as an alternative but that could only temper the disappointment of the rowers, some of whom had travelled long distances to take on the challenge of rowing out to the lighthouse and back.

'Unfortunately, we could not go ahead with the main event due to adverse wind and sea conditions outside the Breakwater,' said principal organiser Jeff Hammond.

'It looked alright on the Met Office forecast for Plymouth right up until 0900 hours but then we got a report from a yacht which we put out at 0830 to say that things were not looking good.'

He added: 'What sealed it was the fact that the trawlers and scallopers were heading back in, so there was no way in which we could send our 40 boats, with 130 people on board, out to open water.'

After checking with Brixham Coastguard, who reported Force-3s and 6s, gusting '7', with winds veering around to the north west, the challenge was abandoned.

First across the line in the re-arranged race were Rob King and Jim King, from Hereford Canoe Club, in a K2 Double Kayak. They were the only boat to complete the course in under two hours. Also performing

well were Andy Durkin and Mark Treals, from Teign Scullers, who recorded an excellent time of two hours and 04.50 minutes in the only double scull present.

Other class winners included Colin Heard (Exeter Canoe Club) K1, 2:21.11; Mayflower Offshore RC (Seaboard quad), 2:00.55; Mumbles Rowing Club (Celtic Longboat), 2:18.39; Swanage Gig Club (Cornish Pilot Gig), 2:17.28, and Ocean Club UK (Ocean Canoe), 2:00.20.

ddgodfrey@btinternet.com

Gig dates

● **CORNISH Pilot Gig** crews are at Appledore in North Devon today and have a choice of events on Saturday.

In Cornwall, the spotlight falls on Truro Regatta while Paignton are also staging a regatta in South Devon.

Williams' crew close to their best but lose out to Swedes

SOUTH West sailor Ian Williams showed glimpses of his world record-equaling form in Sweden yesterday.

But the Devon match racing ace's GAC Pindar crew just came up short when home favourite Bjorn Hansen proved too strong for them in the final of a week-long regatta, sealing victory in the Stena Match Cup Sweden with a 3-1 result.

Despite the defeat, however, the Exmouth skipper and his squad remain strong contenders for another successful season on the Alpari Match Racing Tour and have maintained their pole position at the top of the leaderboard, eight points ahead of Hansen's Hansen Racing outfit after two rounds of this season's competition.

Williams won his semi-final yesterday with a convincing victory over Francesco Bruni (Luna Rossa). The Italian America's Cup challenger had no answer to the pace and skill of the Devon crew, despite winning the first flight on Friday when Williams was given a red flag.

However, the GAC Pindar team fought back to claim three flights in succession and progress to the final where they also made a dream start, taking the first against the hosts' well-supported golden boy. Hansen recovered, though, to score the next three in impressive style, taking advantage of GAC Pindar's penalty in the third flight to win by a clear margin. He then dominated the fourth to seal his third Stena Cup victory in a row.

'It's disappointing not to win, but overall it was a great regatta for us,' conceded Williams. 'Everything just fell to Bjorn today, particularly in the last two flights. The first two rounds of the final were nip-and-tuck and we were disappointed not to go 2-0 up. However, we're still in a commanding position ahead of Sopot (the next regatta at Poland starting on Sunday, August 31) and we'll go hoping to put in a great performance there.'

Williams had Chris Main calling tactics; Graeme Spence on bow, and Mal Parker and Gerry Mitchell working as trimmers.

● **THE West Country-based Artemis Offshore Academy** youngsters took second and third place on the overall 'rookie' podium at this year's Solitaire du Figaro, which included a stopover in Plymouth.

Team Plymouth skipper Sam Goodchild, who hails from Falmouth, was the first British skipper across the line at the end of the race in Cherbourg, claiming 13th place and finishing 22nd overall.

Ottery St Mary's Sam Matson, who learned to sail at Exmouth, regained three positions on the home straight to see him cross the line in 25th place as 'third rookie' on the leg. He finished 15th in his first Figaro, and that made him second 'rookie' overall.

'Coming in from a fourth and final leg to find that out was absolutely overwhelming,' said Matson. Artemis 77 skipper Rich Mason, from Portland, was disappointed with his last leg result, finishing 28th but still took the last spot on the overall 'rookie' podium. 'I was gutted when I got in because I thought I'd lost my "rookie" standing, but then I was told I was third which is brilliant,' he said.

Dartmouth's Henry Bony finished 32nd. 'I knew that if I was to gain any places overall I would have to take some risks,' he said. 'So I went out on a limb and went east after Manacles along the UK shoreline, but it didn't work out.'

jc.collings@btopenworld.com

Cloudbreak

70 mm deep

x 3 cols