

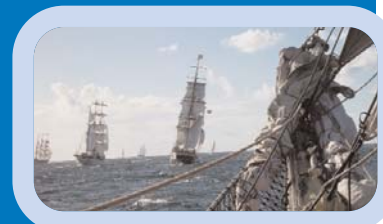
Tall stories

In 2006 the remarkable Tall Ships' Races celebrate their Golden Jubilee commemorating 50 years of exciting racing in these elegant vessels which have helped to teach essential seamanship skills to generations of 15- to 25-year-olds

Words by Julia Dalzell

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AN IDEA ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED in 1953 by a group of Tall Ships enthusiasts from England and Portugal, the first race was organised in 1956 when 20 sailing ships from 10 countries gathered in the English Channel, at Torbay in the south of England, and set out on a race to Lisbon in Portugal. The race was organised to showcase the 'glories of the age of sail' and to bring together young people from different countries. First across the finish line was an Argentinian yacht, Juana but, taking into account the various handicaps, the fastest time – and therefore race winner – was British Ship Moyana. Sadly, on the return journey to England, the Moyana hit treacherous storms and sank, though all the officers and crew – along with their winning trophy – were safely rescued!



IN 1956 THE TALL SHIPS' RACES were organised as a one-off, but after intense media coverage and worldwide interest, the idea caught on and has continued with ever increasing popularity since then. The race usually comprises three different legs between the ports – a competitive race between ports one and two, and ports three and four, with the middle leg being more of a social cruise. This year – the 50th anniversary – repeats the original race course from just off the coast of Torbay, England, to Lisbon in Portugal. The pre-race festivities, however, will take place in Saint Malo, France (Torbay no longer being big enough for the fleet, crews and crowds of spectators!) from 6 to 9 July, with the actual race beginning on 10 July. Not only that, but veteran crew members from the original ships will be taking part and it is expected that there will be a small number of the original ships once again lining up at the start.

SPORT



OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS, more than 90 different ports around Europe have hosted The Tall Ships' Races. This year there will be five host ports – Saint Malo (France), Lisbon (Portugal), Cádiz (Spain), La Coruña (Spain) and Antwerp (Belgium) – all of which will be holding special events and celebrations for the ships' crews and the thousands of visitors that the event attracts. At the end of the final race in Antwerp, the first ships are expected to sail in on 19 August and the evening will be rounded off with a spectacular firework display. Port celebrations, including a crew street parade, will continue until 22 August when the fleet will sail out in a spectacular Parade of Sail.

THE TALL SHIPS' RACES ARE RELIANT on the weather and, as we all know, sometimes the weather doesn't co-operate! In 2005, the start of the first race at Waterford in south-east Ireland had to be delayed by 12 hours because there was no wind and the sea was completely calm. The entire fleet had to motor to the middle of the Irish Sea before they could find enough wind to get going! Then as the second race got underway in Newcastle, England there was so much wind that the press boats couldn't get out to see the start, and some of the racing ships dropped out of the race because the seas were so rough!



THE TALL SHIPS' RACES ARE ORGANISED by Sail Training International (STI), a UK-based charity which has evolved from a group of people passionate about sailing, many of whom have been involved since the very beginnings of the race in the 1950s. STI has recently been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts in promoting international understanding and friendship through sail training for young people. Through STI they can sign up to learn about life on the ocean wave, from the fine art of rigging to the essential teamwork skills needed to battle the sometimes unpredictable seas. Trainees can join various different voyages, including The Tall Ships' Races and, in fact, it is actually a rule of the race that at least 50 per cent of each ship's crew must be made up of 15- to 25-year-olds.

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO WWW.SAILTRAININGINTERNATIONAL.ORG

