

## **Rob interviewing Dani and Mark about Talisker Challenge**

Mark: We've signed up to do the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge in 2023 which is a 3,000 nautical mile row from la Gomera, in the Canary Islands to Antigua, in the Caribbean.

Rob: What gave you this idea, Dani?

Dani: Well, my father actually completed the race back in 2019 and me, and my husband, Mark are very competitive, and we followed my father's journey. My father did it and completed it successfully in 50 days and we want to beat his time. So we are hoping, our target is 45 days at sea. We hope. But obviously it all depends on the weather, the waves and Mother Nature.

Rob: And is this going to be the two of you, is it?

Mark: Just the two of us, yes. We weren't sure when we initially set out whether we would look to do it in a bigger team but we decided a married couple we're very much ... we enjoy each other's company. We're a very solid couple and we, um, it is something we would love to do together.

Dani: We've both had it in our minds that we are going to do this race. Mark, after watching my dad come in wanted to do it straight away so he would have done it this year if he could. Me, I wanted to wait until my children were a little bit older so we compromised on 2023, so we managed to qualify for the race and that is our target. So we just need to raise the funds.

Rob: Well, we'll talk about that in a minute. Now, this is actually a Talisker event?

Dani: Yes.

Rob: So how do they help you with this?

Mark: Talisker are the ...

Dani: Main sponsor.

Mark: They are the sponsor of the race.

Rob: Is it yearly?

Mark: Yes, it happens every year. It leaves on the 12th of December every year. That can change if the weather is not correct but um ...

Rob: Now I am not a sailor or anything but I would have thought that's wintertime. Is that the best time to be going?



Mark: It's the best time of year generally for them to set off with where we are going from, and to. Generally the currents are more in your favour, and there is also a lot lower chance of a hurricane.

Dani: Yes, it's not hurricane season when we get to the other end in Antigua. So we arrive to the nice sunshine.

Rob: Are you going to be rowing non-stop?

Dani: If the boat stops it's very hard to get it going again so the idea is we will row two hours on, two hours off, and we will change shifts. When the weather is good we will row together. Obviously in the blistering heat between 11 and 4 on some days it might be above 40 degrees and we might only be able to row for an hour, and we'll have to do quick changes like that, um, we'll have to see. We have to be flexible with our schedule.

Rob: And a lot depends on the boat, I imagine. Can you tell us a bit about the boat?

Mark: The boat we'll be using is called Cosimo, it's actually in this year's race as well.

Rob: It's been christened, has it?

Mark: It's already done one crossing. We'll be hopefully picking the boat up in April next year and it's built by a company called Rannoch, they're quite specialist boats really. They're not what people expect to see when you say you are going to row an ocean. There's a cabin either end, you've got the bow cabin which is where we'll be sleeping. It's quite basic, it's a bit longer than the stern cabin, but the stern cabin is where all our communication will be. We've got GPS, radio, and ....

Dani: All the controls really. And then in the middle of the boat is where we row so it's the rowing platform.

Mark: We have 2 rowing positions so we can both row at the same time.

Rob: And is it particularly stable, or?

Dani: So we have to have a top of the range boat in order to do it. So all the boats that enter the race all have to be able to self-right themselves as obviously we go against waves that are potentially up to 25-30 foot, and you get rogue waves that come out of nowhere so instead of relying on people to be able to upright the boats themselves, which some of the older fashion boats still do, and are very, very good boats. To make the race a bit better we obviously all have to have these self-righting boats, and Rannoch are one of the leading boat companies that design these boats.

Rob: And for your own safety?

Dani: And for our own safety. I mean, the race attracts a lot of media attention and obviously any incident that happens, if it's got a negative outcome it doesn't look good on the race,

so the race organisers put points in place that you have to have a certain boat, you have to be qualified before you go in the race, you have to be physically able to enter the race and, they don't want people breaking down at sea, do they.

Rob: No. Presumably they have given you some training advice, have they?

Mark: Yes.

Dani: You have to do mandatory courses.

Mark: We have mandatory courses we have to complete before we set off.

Rob: Such as?

Mark: We have a navigation course, a seamanship course, a radio course, and first aid at sea. There are other courses, ocean rowing courses that are recommended that you take which we'll be doing as well. Obviously.

Rob: So how do you prepare yourselves for something like this? Because it's an extraordinarily physically demanding thing that you are just about to do. How have you been training yourselves?

Dani: We have a Concept II rowing machine which we have at home - my father very generously let us borrow his - as it's an expensive piece of kit, but also we have bought a little training boat. It's been good, it gets us out on the lakes at the weekends.

Rob: Whereabouts, which lakes?

Dani: We..um..Priziac, Guerlédan. Next year, once we've got Cosimo with us we'll be up there doing the hard training and then obviously we'll be down at Concarneau, we'll take the boat out and we'll do a few rowing stints in the sea.

Rob: Have you done anything like this before?

Dani: No. We're both trained in canoeing/kayaking as instructors but rowing is a new discipline for us both.

Rob: Now that you've mentioned it once or twice already, the funding is going to be a big issue, isn't it? You've got some time now before December 23 if I am not mistaken, so first of all, what sponsors have you got so far?

Mark: We've got a couple of local businesses on board, and La Gare here is one of our sponsors. We've got an anonymous sponsor who was an ex Welsh guard who has generously donated quite a large sum to our cause. And one of the sponsorship packages we're doing is at the end of the course, once we have finished, they will get to keep one of the oars. They will have the name of the business or their personal name on an oar, and at the end of it they get to keep one of those. And we have one of those go as well, which



is great. We've done our first fundraising event, we did it at the end of August. We did a 24-hour row where we were on the rowing machine for two-hour stints for 24 hours and we raised about 1,500 euros doing that and we did that here at La Gare, again, and we had some really good people from the village help out. They put the bar on, a barbeque, yeah, it was a really good day.

Dani: Yeah, they donated the profits to us from the bar and the barbeque, and it was really nice, and everyone donated their time which is fantastic as obviously we were a bit occupied with rowing. No, it was good community spirit. It was a good day, we had the weather on hand, we had people from the town come. All hours. We had people turn up at three in the morning to come and cheer us on. It was a good community event.

Mark: The support was fantastic.

Rob: So, what else do you have to do then, in the next 18 months or so?

Dani: Next year, when we pick up the boat, we will be doing a few of our mandatory courses when we're back in the U.K. that we have to do. Fundraising, obviously it's not a cheap event, the boat being quite unique isn't the cheapest thing to purchase, but the boat is what will give us the money to donate afterwards. Once we finish the race we will sell our boat and we are donating everything to the local community. Helping the two schools in Guiscriff, funding of the sports project here. I mean, we are going to try and do a lot of fundraising in Guiscriff unless we are doing activities on the boat so obviously we will then have to either go to Priziac or Guerlédan or down to Concarneau. But yeah, most things will be here at La Gare or in the center of Guiscriff itself. So please, everybody come down and support.

Rob: Well, we will be following you closely. In the meantime, you can just tell me about the logo that you've got on your jackets there.

Dani: Oh, our team name. Our team for the race is For Better Oar Worse. For English people, obviously, when you get married you have your vows and 'for better or worse' and then there is a little pun in the name whereas the 'or' is an 'oar' in a boat. Yes, explaining that to the French can be rather ...

Rob: It doesn't work in French, does it?

Dani: Not really, no. So you have to explain it.

Rob: Okay, so [forbetteroarworse.com](http://forbetteroarworse.com) is somewhere where people can find a little bit more out about it.

Dani: Yes, that's our web site and we also have a Facebook group page which is [forbetteroarworse](https://www.facebook.com/forbetteroarworse) so people can follow our journey and we have a few social media on Twitter and Instagram as well.



Rob: Dani, Mark, thanks very much indeed. Best of luck.

Dani and Mark:

Thank you very much.