



# Shelley won't be beaten

She is one of the most revered women on the water, a British champion powerboat driver taking on her male rivals with ease. Yet overcoming a serious accident last year has seen Southampton's Shelley Jory-Leigh achieve even greater things, as Liz Tighe discovered

Shelley Jory-Leigh has just announced plans to take part in a round-the-world powerboat record breaking attempt, which will see her join a crew of seven daredevils from across Britain for a gruelling 50 days at sea in November.

It is a huge challenge for even the most experienced powerboat racers, but for Shelley, who a year ago was contemplating whether to abandon the sport she loved altogether, following an 85-mile-an-hour crash, it is an all the more impressive feat.

Born in Southampton, Shelley made her debut as an amateur powerboat enthusiast, supporting her then boyfriend who was keen to become part of the local racing fraternity.

"From the very start, I was hugely ambitious," she said. "I was in charge of sponsorship and marketing initially, but it wasn't very long before I wanted to be the one doing the racing."

As a woman in what continues to be a male-dominated sport, Shelley had soon made a name for herself and it was not long before she was getting requests from other teams to join them.

"At the bottom level of powerboat racing, weight is a big factor," she said. "That I could handle the boats competently and weighed a lot less than the other guys gave me the edge. Racing at speeds of 100 miles-an-hour takes guts and, because I had always been a daredevil, I wasn't afraid to push myself to the limit."

Shelley was soon racing internationally with her first major achievement in 2002 when she won a bronze medal in the Two Litre World Championships. The same year she won the Gibraltar Championships.

Thereafter, Shelley went through the classes and gained her first grand prix win at Istanbul,

Turkey, in 2009 partnered by Maltese throttle-woman Audrien Ciantar.

Last year, competing for the 2010 Powerboat P1 World Championship, a freak accident in Sardinia saw her boat explode on impact as it hit a wave, leaving her and driving partner, Patrick Huybrieghts, seriously injured.

"The impact of the boat on the water is very gruelling at any time," said Shelley. "It felt like we had driven into a brick wall. Sheer adrenaline got me through, allowing me to radio for help and support Patrick who was pouring blood."

Shelley was relatively unscathed physically, but the effects of concussion lasted six months. "I felt like I was permanently drunk," she said. "All I wanted to do was get into bed and even walking felt unstable. It was one of the worst times of my life. Days blurred into each other and I felt like I would never get back to normal."

Husband and powerboat engineer Trevor Leigh saw her through; his encouragement allowed her to regain confidence.

"Trevor and I both know the dangers of the sport," she said, "and being able to talk through what had happened with someone who is directly involved in power boating was a great support."

Last August, Shelley returned to the water for the first time. "Getting into a power boat again took some doing and after half-a-day on the water, I needed to get back to land," she said.

November marked a turning point as Shelley flew out to Florida for the US Powerboat Championships. "I watched as a spectator and knew I had to get back in the driving seat again."

Just before Christmas, British ocean adventurer Alan Priddy asked Shelley to consider joining him for his world-record Global

Circumnavigation Challenge and presented her with a challenge she just could not resist. The record is currently held by the New Zealander Pete Bethune, at 60 days 23 hours 49 minutes.

"On the trip we'll be going at half the speed we do when we race," she said, "But that is still demanding, particularly in the conditions we are likely to face as we go round the world. But what has motivated me more than anything else to do this is to be part of something so very special. I can't imagine a greater challenge and I'm delighted to be part of the team."

Each team member must raise £50,000, requiring the support of sponsors, each of whom will feature on the hull of the boat.

"That is a challenge in itself," said Shelley. Power boating has always been seen as the sport of the wealthy and as such does not attract the kinds of sponsorship that sailing enjoys." That means that everyone involved with the sport needs to earn an independent living, too, and sponsorship is vital. An average year's costs run in to hundreds of thousands of pounds."

Shelley's boundless energy has been as much a part of her success as her capabilities on the water. With her greatest challenge just months away, this local lady is certainly a force to be reckoned with.

Left: Shelley when racing at Malta; Below: Shelley, right, in dramatic racing action

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For details about Shelley and sponsorship for the Circumnavigation Challenge visit [www.circumnavigationrecord.com](http://www.circumnavigationrecord.com) or [www.shelleyjory.com](http://www.shelleyjory.com).

