

Maiden Discussion Guide
Pickford Film Center - DOC ED DISCUSSION GUIDE, 2019

MAIDEN (2018)

Directed by Alex Holmes

STORY: This documentary tells the story of the first all female crew in the prestigious Whitbread Around the World sailing race in 1989. Led by Tracy Edwards, these women proved themselves to a skeptical press and the sailing establishment by winning 2 of 5 legs and ultimately coming in 2nd in their class. This was the best performance by a British ship of any kind since 1977.

CREW:

Tracy Edwards - Skipper, navigator. Currently author, motivational speaker, founder of a charity benefiting young girls and their right to an education.

Jo Gooding - Cook, photographer. Currently a therapist and chair of the board VIBE YOUTH CIC

Mikaela Von Koskull, Helm, Sail Trimmer

Nancy Hill, Sail Trimmer

Jeni Mundy, electronics, foredeck

Sally Creaser, foredeck

Mandi Swan, rigger

Michele Paret, Helm

Angela Farrell, Sail Trimmer

Claire Russell, doctor

Tanja Visser, Sail Master, photographer

Dawn Riley, Sail Trimmer

FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

1. Which scenes stick with you most vividly after viewing?
2. Are you able to tell where the footage is coming from, whether it is current or archival? Where were the cameras?
3. Are you more interested in the sport of sailboat racing, or the more political aspects of this documentary?
4. How did you feel about the way the press handled the Maiden story and crew?

AROUND THE WORLD SAILBOAT RACING:

Roles aboard the ship: On a sailboat, everyone has a job or assignment. Sometimes it's a specialty assignment, like a cook or navigator. Crew also have watch assignments, their turns to stand watch.

Crew - Everyone on the boat except the captain or skipper.

Skipper or captain – Person in charge of the boat. They are responsible for the safety of the crew and the boat.

Watch - The international law of the sea requires at least one crew member to be awake, keeping a lookout, at all times. This person or group of people is called a watch. They are the captain's eyes. If the watch sees anything in the water (like another boat or an iceberg), if there is an emergency on the boat, or if a crew member is sick or hurt, the watch tells the captain right away. On a racing sailboat there is a full crew on each watch as there is the additional speed requirement. *Maiden* had crew (except skipper and cook) on a 4 hour rotation (four hours on, four hours off). This schedule is maintained around the clock.

Navigator - the person who chooses what route the boat will take.

A quote about navigation:

“Ocean navigation is a lot like financial management. Navigators rely on weather forecasts much like investment managers rely on earnings projections. In both cases those forecasts start out highly inaccurate and get more precise as they move closer to real time. Within a few hours, they're spot-on, but by then it's too late for a boat moving at 20 knots to exploit a fast-moving weather system 200 miles away. So much like a commodities trader or a bond manager, Oxley(navigator) must develop a point of view long in advance about where the best winds will lie, then position the boat to take advantage of them as they develop. He has 20 years of data to help narrow the odds of where high-velocity winds will show up on a particular leg of the race.”

“The Volvo Ocean Race: A \$20 Million Test of Sailing Endurance”, Daniel Fisher,*Forbes*, 7-18-2014

Helm - The steering wheel, the person who steers the course set by the navigator and ordered by the skipper.

Rigger - A boat's rigging refers to the lines and mechanical parts (like pulleys) that attach sails to the boat and hold them in place. In extreme conditions, the force of the wind and sea can cause so much strain they will break. The **rigger** is hoisted up high every day, like an aerial acrobat, to inspect and fix the rigging. Tension can be adjusted in the rigging in order to increase the efficiency of the sails. This is called “tuning” the rigging.

Electronics - The person in charge of the boat's electronic systems: radar, weather reporting, radio communication, GPS/chart plotter, satellite phone and emergency equipment.

Sail Trimmer. This crew decides how to adjust the sails to maximize efficiency on a given course. They must decide which sails to use, how much of the sail to use, how to position and shape them.

1. What role would you like to perform on a sailboat?
2. Which of these roles might require more physical strength?

Expense

Around the world sailboat racing is very expensive. Most teams use custom built yachts costing millions of dollars. Tracy Edwards was unable to find funds adequate to purchase a custom boat, so she mortgaged her home and bought a used, aluminum hulled yacht in poor condition. The crew of Maiden rebuilt the whole thing. Tracy has said that most potential sponsors were not willing to risk investing in an all-woman crew.

1. Tracy says that she believes the resulting familiarity her crew had with their boat was a distinct advantage. Can you think of ways this might have helped them during the race?
2. In an interview Tracy recently said that the 3 years the crew spent together rebuilding the boat and preparing for the race made them “battle hardened” and more cohesive as a group. Many of the better funded (male) crews had very little time together before race day. www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CIVVdbKKag (Youtube, Build Series, Ricky Camaleri) What does this say about the importance of teamwork during a very long and grueling race? Do you think their time together helped the women communicate better in a stressful environment?
3. **The Whitbread Round the World Race** changed its name to the **Volvo Ocean Race** in 2001 and in 2019 it was changed to **The Ocean Race**. Racers now use identical vessels and sail in the same class. This change was partly in response to the ever increasing expense of these types of races, and the undue advantage given by expensive, sophisticated equipment. Are there other sports you know of where having a lot of money gives you a big advantage? Do you believe that levelling the playing field financially will make for a better competition? How inclusive can a race like this actually be?
4. Another new rule of The Ocean Race is that crews are limited to seven *men*. Teams which include women are allowed 2-4 extra crew members. Do you think this incentivizing is a good thing for women’s racing?

MEDIA AND THE MAIDEN

“We saw ourselves as professional racers. The world saw us as a human interest story”- Tracy Edwards

This documentary shows a wealth of archival footage featuring interviews of the crew by the press of the day. Mostly, the Maiden crew were referred to as “girls,” and once, famously, as “a tinfoil of tarts”. The sailing establishment was emphatic that, as Tracy puts it, “You’re not strong enough. You’re not skilled enough. You’re all going to die”. In fact, many wagers were placed as to how far the Maiden crew would actually get. Several suggested that they could not even complete the first leg. When they did complete that leg, in third place, they were asked some pretty dull questions. “How are you all getting along?” Tracy was asked to smile and she replies “This is my smile.”

1. How often do you hear adult women referred to as “girls”?
2. Do you think that the male crews were asked the same questions as the female crews?

“The ocean’s always trying to kill you.”-Tracy Edwards

The second leg of the race was perhaps the most dangerous. The Southern Ocean is big water. The further south you go, the bigger the waves, and more potential trouble with partially submerged icebergs. Every other racing crew took the safest course to Western Australia. Maiden went the furthest south, into more hazardous, but also potentially speedier conditions. As she has said later, she knew that their boat Maiden was heavier, and slower than the newer vessels they raced against. That would also make her stronger.(Royal Yachting, 5/27/10)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wU1AF-6bXo&t=628s It was a calculated risk. Maiden won her division for this leg of the race. The best performance by any British boat since 1977.

1. Did this victory change the way the press spoke to and about the crew of Maiden?
2. What do you think of the risk that Tracy took by heading for the more dangerous route?
3. At various times, the Maiden crew tell us how much fun it was, how exhilarating the ride was. Do you think you would enjoy surfing a 20 foot wave in a sailboat?

The third leg of the race was shorter, and more “tactical”. Tactics involve positioning relative to other boats, keeping your vessel in “clean air” and disadvantaging other boats by blocking their wind etc. In this section, the women were reducing sail more quickly than the other crews, which meant they were passed by boats with bigger sail area, but gave them the advantage in recovery time. Maiden won this leg also. The captain of Rucanor had called their winning the first leg a “fluke”. After two wins in a row, it should have been pretty clear to everyone that Maiden’s performance was no fluke.

Tracy had 3 crew members who she describes as “hot on tactics.” She has also said that it was not a strong point of her own. In interviews she says that she learned from her mother to surround herself with people who were smarter or more experienced than herself. (Royal Yachting Interview)

1. What do you think it takes to be a good leader?
2. One of the most experienced sailors who was initially with the Maiden crew was Marie-Claude. She overpowered Tracy at times, and was fired shortly after the warm up race which Maiden never finished. Why did Tracy fire Marie-Claude?
3. Many of the crew considered leaving after Marie-Claude was fired. What would you have done, do you think? Why do you think the crew decided to stay on?

The most syndicated sports photograph of the year was the shot of Maiden's crew coming into port wearing bathing suits. Tracy says they did this to distract the press from their poor performance in the leg.

1. What do you think of this strategy?
2. Did you enjoy this part of the film, or did it bother you?
3. Can you see a change in Tracy and the crew's media savvy as the film progresses, and in the commentary from the women today?

FILMMAKER'S PROCESS

Alex Holmes got the idea for the documentary after hearing Tracy Edwards speak at his daughter's school. (Build Series interview) He originally thought that the Maiden story would be a narrative feature as he had no idea that there would be so much footage. When the race organizers suggested to all Whitbread crews that they carry cameras, none were so eager as Maiden's crew. Tracy told Alex where to look for the archival footage. As it turned out, Jo Gooding had taken a 4-day course to learn to use the camera. She got very good at getting quite evocative shots. They decided to place a camera up in the rigging so that they could roll film when the action got hot. Tracy mentions that the camera was running a lot of the time without the crew paying it much attention.

1. Are people today much more aware of the cameras around them?
2. All of the music had to be removed from the footage as they didn't want to pay for the rights to use that. Maiden always had music playing. What would you listen to on a sailboat?

Alex says that he did not have to do much explaining as a director, the story was already there. The observational filmmaking on the part of Jo made his job easier. When Tracy asked the crew who participated in the documentary how they wanted to play this, they all decided to be as honest as they could be, "warts and all". Alex says that their ability to be honest gave the doc a very real feel.

1. Does being honest help people to tell a better story?