

Rower's naked ambition

■ Project manager tackles 2,900-mile trans-Atlantic crossing in the nude

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WHEN dedicated Chris Martin celebrates his 25th birthday next week it will be one to remember, for he will spend it in a boat rowing naked across the Atlantic.

The project manager, from Summer Road, in Molesey, is taking part in the three month Transatlantic Rowing Race, organised every two years by Woodvale Events, and sheds his clothes during the daytime to prevent painful chafing.

His proud parents Keith and Isabel and brother Michael, 21, have been keeping tabs on his progress via satellite phone and through the regular updates Chris posts to a website.

Keith, 54, of Ferndale Avenue, Chertsey, said: "About two years ago he came home and told the family he was going to do this with a friend.

"Then a couple of weeks later his mate cried off and he said 'don't worry dad, I'll do it myself'.

"I thought we would be in pieces with the worry of it, but we're not because we have seen how hard he prepared for this. He has put his body and soul into it.

"Before he went I asked him in all seriousness if he had made a will, because he would be alone in the Atlantic and anything could go wrong.

"He said there was no point because he had nothing to leave, he had put everything he had into this challenge."

Chris, who holds a degree in product design from Brunel University, works for Design & Display Systems, in Sutton, which produces water slides and other fibreglass structures.

He wanted to take part in the rowing challenge to raise money for the Breast Cancer Campaign and Prostate Cancer Charity, and has received sponsorship from 'numerous individuals' and £20,000 from telecom company Stappard Howes, of Heriot Road, Chertsey.

Chris's boat Pacific Pete, named after legendary ocean rower Peter Bird, is 23ft and is one of 26 which departed from La Gomera, in the Canary Islands, on November 30.

Olympic gold medallist James Cracknell and TV presenter Ben Fogle are also taking part and are rowing as a duo. Chris is one of only two competitors to attempt the feat solo and is up against 20 doubles and four groups of four.

Dad Keith added: "So far on his voyage Chris has had many setbacks and has



■ Chris's daily routine

- 6am Alarm goes off and Chris does 30 minutes of stretches and takes an anti-inflammatory drug for his back
- 6.30am Starts rowing
- 7.30am Applies sun cream and has breakfast
- 8am Rowing
- 1pm Lunch
- 1.30pm Rowing all afternoon with a 15-minute rest at 3pm
- 5.30pm Dinner and a rest
- 6.30pm Rowing until last meal at 9pm
- 9.30pm Time for one more hour rowing and then bed at 11pm

overcome them with great determination and courage. His water-maker, which makes sea water drinkable, broke and he had to use reserves and collect rain water.

"He had a shark swim close, has had back strain and broke two oars within five minutes. On January 8, he capsized on rough seas and his cooker sank.

"He lost his two remaining oars, so he had to surf with the current for four days, until the organisers' yacht reached him.

"We got a call from him when it happened and he told us that the boat didn't self-right, but with some determination he managed to turn it back over himself.

"He was fine and even laughing about it on the phone. Luckily the cabin stayed watertight so all his equipment was okay."

Chris, who celebrates his 25th birthday on January 27, is expecting to complete his voyage in three to four weeks. He is the leading soloist and has overtaken six doubles.

He is surviving on freeze-dried



OARSOME: Chris practices the mammoth task and, left, while a pupil at St Paul's, Addlestone

rations and has a new, lightweight stove, on a piece of wood. He rows 12 hours a day and is able to stay in contact with dry land via his phone and computer, which are powered using a solar panel on the boat.

Chris, who is single, grew up in Chertsey and attended Meadowcroft School and then St Paul's School, in Addlestone. He was bitten by the rowing bug as a 14-year-old attending Hampton School.

Keith said: "He wasn't the best at rugby and football and claims he had poor co-ordination, so they put him in a boat and he never looked back.

"He was appointed captain of the boats at school and has represented Great Britain in successive World Rowing Championships, winning bronze, silver and gold medals. His ambition is to represent the country in the Olympics one day."

Chris spends his spare time rowing with the Molesey Boat Club, while his younger brother Michael has represented Surrey at 800m, 1,500m and cross country running.

His father added: "Chris is modest and good humoured and he is ultra serious about his rowing.

"A couple of years back I saw him

strapping on his trainers preparing to go for a run. I said: 'Chris have a break, it's Christmas'.

The race is due to finish in mid to late February at the English Harbour

on the West Indian island of Antigua and will represent a journey of more than 2,930 miles. To read Chris's daily reports and to sponsor him, log on to www.transatlanticforce.co.uk



MAKING A SPLASH: Chris gets his first experience in a boat with dad, Keith, at the age of two