

**How much risk and sacrifice would you take on for a set of steak knives?**

## **SISC TWINS GETTING READY FOR THE IDITAROD OF SAILING**

*article by Jonathan Chilvers*

Two of the toughest and craziest races in the world have roots in Alaska. One is the dog mushers' Derby, the 938 mile dog sled race from Anchorage to Nome known as The Iditarod. The other is the roughly 750 mile boat race from Port Townsend to Ketchikan known as the R2AK. You have to be at least a little crazy to attempt either. Well, quite a lot crazy really. Just starting takes all kinds of nerve. Finishing takes skill, endurance and a certain brutal determination. And this June 3 your hometown favourites crossing the R2AK start line in Port Townsend will be a crew of young men from Saltspring who learned to sail at your very own club. Say hello to Team McGuffin, who will probably turn out to be the youngest team ever in this madcap adventure.

Here's how R2AK works. Any watercraft can enter as long as it doesn't have an engine. Note that this does not mean "Don't use one" or "Temporarily disable it" or "It's OK in a dire emergency". It means take the damn thing right out of there. You're on your own. You can sail, row, paddle, pedal or get out and push if you like, but absolutely no motors. That's pretty much it for rules.

First prize is \$10,000. That would be US dollars. Not bad. Second prize is a set of steak knives. Who knows what they could be worth? They look nice enough. Eight of them in a pretty little case. Could maybe be worth as much as \$69.99. There is no third prize.

So obviously the lure is not the gold but the glory and the zany, devil-may-care adventure of it all, just being part of the thrill of a lifetime. This year's entrants so far include, for example, a male-female duo from Belfast, Maine, in a 20 foot rowboat; a man from Holland on a 17'6" Stand Up Paddleboard; a team from New York in a 25' trimaran; there's a Hawaiian outrigger sailing canoe; there are more familiar sailboats with names like Beneteau, Alberg, Santa Cruz; and who we are really here to tell you about—Team McGuffin from Saltspring aboard their J24.

The full crew includes 19 year old twins Callum and Cianan, their older brother Finn who will be a hoary veteran of 23 when the starting gun is fired, and their young friend Duncan Macdonald who at 16 is helping keep the average age low enough that they will likely be the youngest R2AK crew ever. The twins are the most experienced and passionate sailors and they started to learn under Leh Smallshaw at the SISC Summer Sailing School in 2012. By 2015 they started on the Club racing team under Greg Slakov. Since then they have won a mantelpiece full of trophies in local races and regattas. They have competed in the Round Saltspring, the Southern Straits and the Swiftsure. They would love to be part of the Summer Olympics in the 49er racing dinghy and dream about entering the Round the World Volvo Ocean Race. But for this year it's got to be the wild and crazy R2AK.

Brother Finn and young friend Duncan are not quite as experienced as racers, but the team is training together as hard and as often as school and jobs permit. Finn and Duncan are mustard keen, fast learners and totally committed. That means that pretty well every spare minute is spent on the water.

The R2AK course comes in two stages. The first is a one day sprint across the Strait of Juan de Fuca from Port Townsend to Victoria. This may weed out a few boats that are not quite ready for the long leg, expose the design flaws in some equipment, convince some of the racers that this was fun but it's time to go home now. Pause for parties, raucous ruckus and general hilarity.

The second leg is from Victoria to Ketchikan, non-stop if you've got that kind of endurance, but you are allowed to stop for a nap, a beer, or a resupply as long as you don't have any pre-arranged help. Last year 34 signed up for the second leg, 21 finished. A serendipitous encounter with a good Samaritan is fine; your buddy pulling up in a pick-up at an agreed rendezvous point with replacement parts or extra supplies will get you disqualified. The course is up to you. There are just two mandatory waypoints: you have to wave to and be recognized by some sort of official person as you go through Seymour Narrows and pass by Bella Bella. Other than that, pick your own route.

So what happens in the R2AK when the wind doesn't blow? Any form of human powered propulsion is legitimately in the cards. Originally the McGuffins were planning on oars as back-up power, as many others in this race do. What sort of rig it takes to row a 24' sailboat is a bit of a mystery to me, and apparently it wasn't entirely clear to them either because their plans have changed. Now they are counting on pedal power. They have just taken delivery of an H2ProPower Pedal Drive system designed and more commonly used for kayaks, with a propeller at the business end.



The winner of last year's race, an all-woman eight-member crew aboard the 32' *Melges Sails Like A Girl*, used this kind of pedal power when the wind died. They had the largest boat and biggest crew in the race and they figured they could get about one knot from windless pedal power, and those women were no wimps. Callum is hoping that the boys will be able to maintain a speed of 1.5 knots under pedal power: their boat is eight feet shorter and about 800 pounds lighter than *Sails Like A Girl*. Might make a difference.

Whatever. Winning certainly isn't everything. Possibly not very much of anything at all. The \$10,000 would be nice. The steak knives would be cool. But really it is all about the adventure, the challenge, the absolutely insane thrill of it all.

What you should do now is wish them all kinds of luck, all kinds of fun, and a memory to last a lifetime.

*for further information about the race, see <https://r2ak.com>*



**Callum**



**Cianan**