

Teen sailor had her doubts before sailing around globe

Close Up

BY KRISTEN GELINEAU
Associated Press Writer

SYDNEY (AP) — The young Australian who spent seven months sailing around the world said critics who doubted her abilities had some company — the 16-year-old herself.

Jessica Watson, who became the youngest person to sail around the globe solo, nonstop and unassisted when she cruised into Sydney Harbor May 15, acknowledged in an interview aired a day later that she shared the concerns of people who said she might not be up to the journey of 23,000 nautical miles.

"It was driving me mad, because I hadn't actually done any solo sailing. And here I was telling the world I was about to sail solo, nonstop and unassisted around the world — and I hadn't actually been out by myself," Watson told Australia's Ten Network, which helped sponsor her trip.

She already has a book deal, a television documentary is in the works and her handlers have booked her for a series of public appearances.

"I knew I could do it, but there was just that niggling doubt ... but yeah, it was fine in the end, obviously."

Watson spent 210 days guiding her 34-foot sailboat, Ella's Pink Lady, through raging storms and 40-foot waves. She also survived the seven times her yacht was knocked down by the wind and waves.

"All of a sudden you're sort of upside down or on your side and then time sort of stops and you're going, 'Oh my goodness,'" she said. "You just don't know what's going to be left on deck."

Still, the days leading up to storms were the most unnerving for Watson, who has been sailing since she was 8.

"I was completely exhausted at the time. I was sort of a bit numb. So I wasn't actually thinking it was possible to get that scared," she said. "But before a storm, before you know it's going to get bad, it worries you — it hangs over your whole life for a few days until it happens."

Watson amassed a large following during her voyage. She regularly updated her blog with details of her journey, from the dramatic knockdowns, to the simple joy of



AP Photo/ROB GRIFFITH

Sixteen-year-old Jessica Watson works with the rigging as she sails past the finish line at the entrance to Sydney Harbour in Sydney, Australia, in mid May, capping off a nearly 23,000 nautical mile voyage that many thought she wouldn't survive.

watching the sun set over glassy waters.

Thousands lined the harbor to cheer on the teen as she cruised past the finish line in May, and she was greeted by the prime minister after docking at the Opera House.

All the attention was overwhelming, she said, but the support made it possible to survive the solitude.

"Just knowing that there were so many people thinking of me out there, that made a difference," she said. "You couldn't get lonely knowing that there were so many people thinking of you."

Watson sailed northeast through the South Pacific and across the equator, south to Cape Horn at the tip of South America, across the Atlantic Ocean to South Africa, through the Indian Ocean and around southern Australia.

The teen's feat will not be considered an official world record, however, because the World Speed Sailing

Record Council discontinued its "youngest" category.

Australian Jesse Martin holds the record for the youngest person to sail around the world solo, nonstop and unassisted, after he completed the journey in 1999 at the age of 18.

The lack of record-holder status has done little to quell the adoration Watson is receiving from fans and sponsors. She already has a book deal, a television documentary is in the works and her handlers have booked her for a series of public appearances.

The day after her arrival, she had already achieved one of her most immediate goals: getting a long, uninterrupted night's sleep in a bed that didn't move.

Online: <http://jessicawatson.com.au>

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