

## September 2nd 1989

I have just written the date and realised that I never thought this day would come. What a mixture of emotions we all went through today. And the crazy thing is that I wasn't nervous once. Today not a doubt in sight. I was so sure of myself. When I have to be in charge I can do it. I think I was the calmest person.

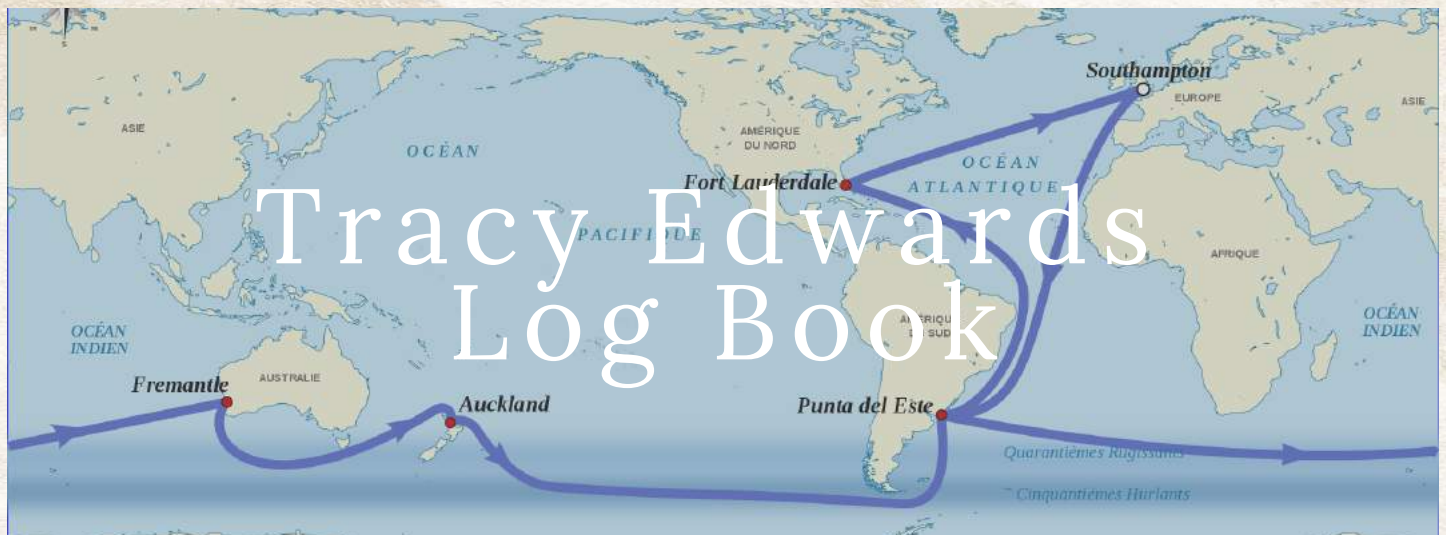
When I woke this morning I thought 'Right, get up and go and do the Whitbread.' I had a bath and finished packing. Got down to the Pink House (where the crew lived in Hamble) on time after a sad farewell to the dogs. I'll really miss them and the house. It was a quiet still morning with a mist on the river. The Pink House was dead when I got there but Pam and Linda were cooking breakfast. Good as gold eh?

People started arriving Janie (who employed me on my first ever boat). Then everyone was having breakfast – the girls slightly giggly. I am so proud of them.

Jeni was quiet, Nancy was in tears cuddling Pam. The Shore Crew have been absolutely brilliant, we could not have done any of this without them. There was a great feeling in the house. I left with Janie and Simon – still quite nervous.

The quay was empty when we got there. The boats looked like racehorses straining at their halters. What a romantic sight as we looked down at them. I felt the first catch of breath, a lump in my throat and my stomach jumped. My eyes stung: 'Don't cry'. So I put my head down and marched off looking neither left, or right. Simon was very quiet.





When we arrived Hugh Myers was there putting on the main – they had finished it! People began to arrive. I put my things away. Then we put the main up and looked at it – beautiful. More people and pontoon getting lower. My family looked so proud – Mum so small. Still no butterflies, just a million emotions fighting each other – happiness winning.

Then Howard arrived – we held each other close – I still can't believe it. Howard got emotional; the hour dragged on with the girls wanting to go. I saw the love shining in Mum's eyes: I love her so much. I said goodbye to Simon: I am really going to miss him.

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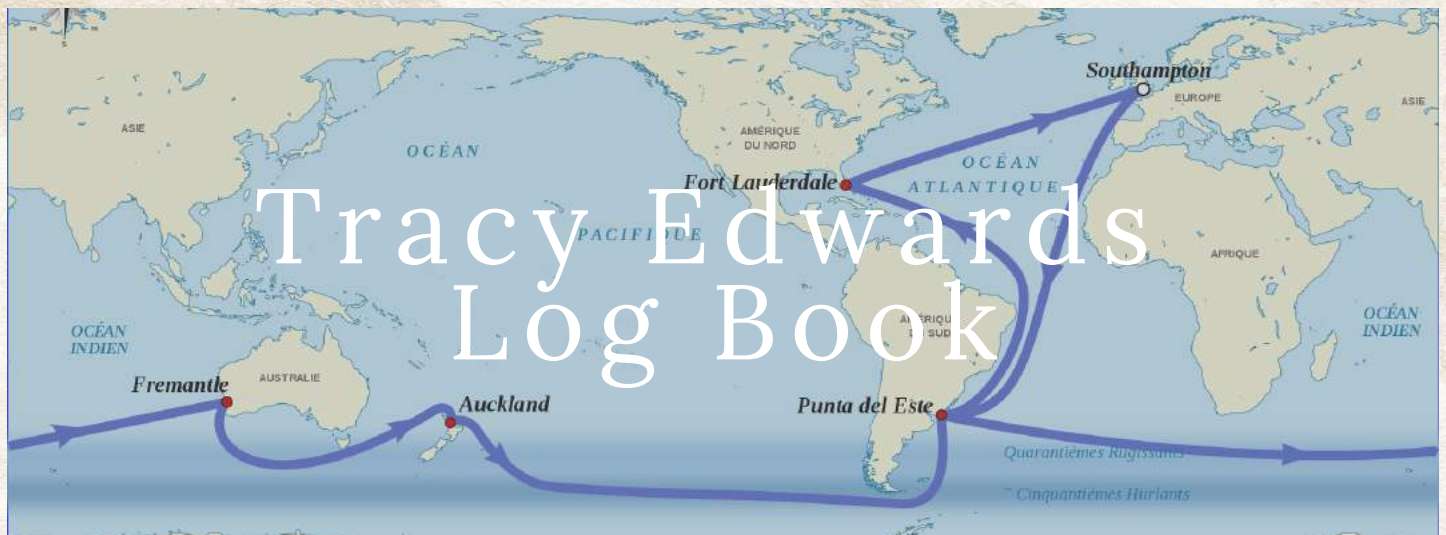
We hung off waiting for Rothmans and NCB Ireland and followed them out. The dock and quay above erupted with cheering and clapping. Gulp! The Solent had started to fill with yachts and boats of all sizes. It was a magic sight. Our support boat came up behind us, everyone looking ecstatic. By this time I was feeling very emotional.

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As we motored around, the Duchess of York called us up on the radio. She was standing on the top deck of the Navy ship from which her husband Prince Andrew would fire the start gun. How fantastic!



She wished us good luck and told us we had better win. We chatted away and the girls cheered into the radio. Then we went over to the ship and gave three cheers and waved. She waved back and shouted; The Duke waved as well.

Then we put the main up. Still loads of boats getting in the way. Headsail up; I misjudged the start badly. Whoops!

Can you believe that the only thing I was thinking as we crossed the start line was 'damn it, what a lousy start'. Not exactly what I had in mind. Nirvana closed in and our other boats found us. The Jordanians, our wonderful sponsors, were ecstatic and so was everyone else.

Howard, Tim and I kept locking gazes and we knew what we were saying without words. We trailed after the Maxis and Rucanor, ahead for once! Going down the Solent was bloody amazing. People waving and cheering.

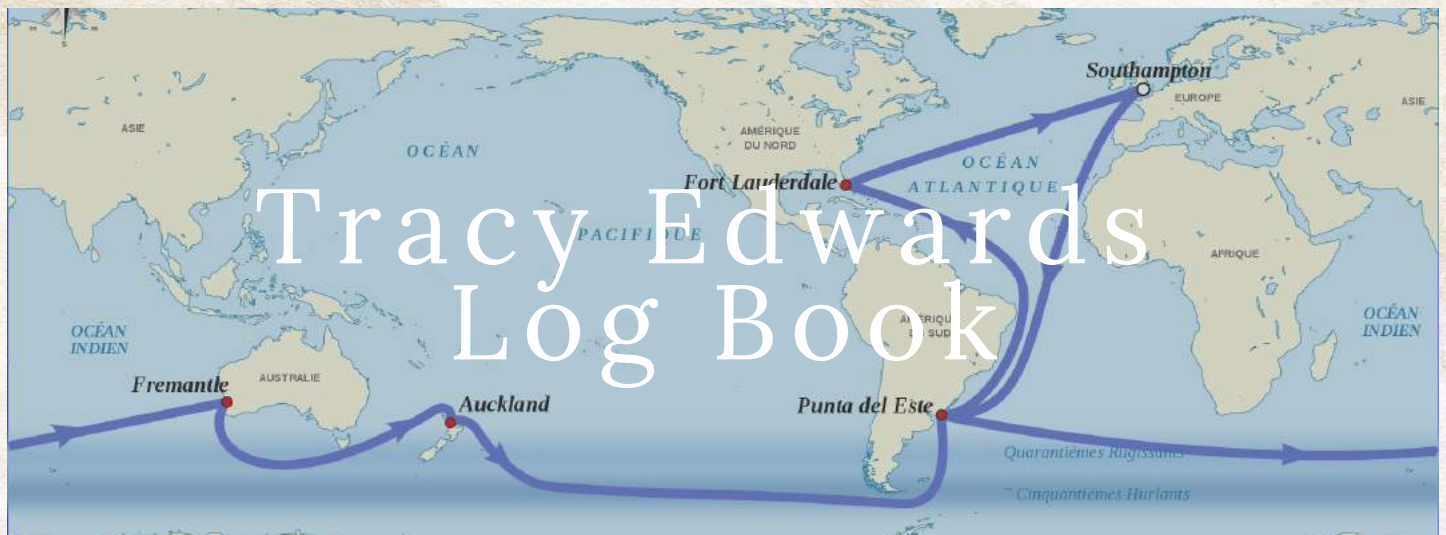
Michele took over the wheel for a while and, finally, I cried. It all came in a big rush. Great in front of all those people and live on television.

Then the crew all cheered me and said thank you. The camera rolling away. Everyone on Nirvana waving, Mum fit to burst. What a wonderful world. All the girls beaming, everyone happy.

We reached all the way down the Solent ploughing past spectator boats. I wanted this to last forever. It suddenly seemed impossible to remember how impossible an all-female crew on the start line was. I steered again. God, my love for sailing has come back. I love the boat, I love the crew, and I have my pride and confidence back.



As we headed past the Needles and out of the Solent, boats dropped back. Schlüssel von Bremen got stuck on the Shingles Bank – we felt really sorry for them. Nirvana went aground and had to go back. We didn't have time to say goodbye. The Mum's boat blew its horn and turned to go back; sad but happy. A few other boats came and cheered us then they were gone too. And, quite suddenly, we were alone.



We switched to GMT for boat time and after another couple of hours sailing down the channel, we started the watch system with the first watch going down for a break. By 1700 the wind had swung round and we had the 0.75 spinnaker up with full main. We could see Rucanor to leeward of us as we passed the Channel Racon to Port. The wind dropped as the sun dipped and Rucanor started to fall away. We stayed high for speed although quite difficult in the choppy seas.

The first dinner is always a special meal and I love it. We are alone, it is just us and Maiden. Kristen is cooking on the first leg as Jo broke her wrist on the Fastnet and will be flying to meet us in Uruguay. The Nav station is opposite the Galley so as got ready to do Radio Duty that first night with just the glow of the radar to light the chart table, the light from Galley shone brightly. I could hear the excited chatter of the girls as they gathered round the Galley to get their bowls of food. Fresh food for the first few days and then it would be freeze dried – ugh!

By midnight everyone had eaten and was either on deck on watch or in their bunks. We had developed a rolling watch system where two teams of five were divided into twos and threes.

Every two hours two or three people would change. This meant that there were always people on deck who knew what was going on rather than the old system of all change at once. I called all the other boats in the fleet and took their positions before sending them back to Race Office.

On the last race I was the cook and now I am on the radio speaking on equal terms with my heroes and legends of Ocean Racing like Sir Peter Blake, Grant Dalton and Skip Novak. Just awesome...Before I got ready for a couple of hours kip I went on deck and sat by the helm watching the boat move through the water and listening to the sea slide past Maiden's hull. There is nothing on earth like the first night at sea. Nothing. When I finally hit the sack at midnight we had been going for 12 hours and had covered 98 miles.

