

## From *Taking on the World*

Ellen MacArthur became famous in 2001 when she competed in the Vendée Globe solo round-the-world yacht race. She was the youngest (24 years old) and probably the shortest (just 5ft 2in!) competitor. She came second, despite appalling weather, exhaustion and, as she describes here, problems with her boat.

I climbed the mast on Christmas Eve, and though I had time to get ready, it was the hardest climb to date. I had worked through the night preparing for it, making sure I had all the tools, mouse lines and bits I might need, and had agonised for hours over how I should prepare the halyard<sup>1</sup> so that it would stream out easily below me and would not get caught as I climbed.

When it got light I decided that the time was right. I kitted up in my middle layer clothes as I didn't want to wear so much that I wouldn't be able to move freely up there. The most dangerous thing apart from falling off is to be thrown against the mast, and though I would be wearing a helmet it would not be difficult to break bones up there.

I laid out the new halyard on deck, flaking it neatly so there were no twists. As I took the mast in my hands and began to climb I felt almost as if I was stepping out on to the moon – a world over which I had no control. You can't ease the sheets<sup>2</sup> or take a reef<sup>3</sup>, nor can you alter the settings for the autopilot. If something goes wrong you are not there to attend to it. You are a passive observer looking down at your boat some 90 feet below you. After climbing just a couple of metres I realised how hard it was going to be, I couldn't feel my fingers – I'd need gloves, despite the loss of dexterity. I climbed down, getting soaked as we ploughed into a wave – the decks around my feet were awash. I unclipped my jumars<sup>4</sup> from the halyard and put on a pair of sailing gloves. There would be no second climb on this one – I knew that I would not have the energy.

As I climbed my hands were more comfortable, and initially progress was positive. But it got harder and harder as I was not only pulling my own weight up as I climbed but also the increasingly heavy halyard – nearly 200 feet of rope by the time I made it to the top. The physical drain came far less from the climbing than from the clinging on. The hardest thing is just to hang on as the mast slices erratically through the air. There would be the odd massive wave which I could feel us surf down, knowing we would pile into the wave in front. I would wrap my arms around the mast and press my face against its cold and slippery carbon surface, waiting for the shuddering slowdown. Eyes closed and teeth gritted, I hung on tight, wrists clenched together, and hoped. Occasionally on the smaller waves I would be thrown before I could hold on tight, and my body and the tools I carried were thrown away from the mast; I'd be hanging on by just one arm, trying to stop myself from smacking back into the rig.

**Comment [YA1]:** We feel sympathy because she is the least experienced.

**Comment [YA2]:** Additional disadvantages arouse sympathy

**Comment [YA3]:** A great sense of achievement because she triumphed despite all these problems

**Comment [YA4]:** Sympathy and lone struggle as Christmas Eve should be a time spend with family and friends, but she is alone in facing this challenge

**Comment [YA5]:** Repetition of "I" emphasizes how this is a lone struggle

**Comment [YA6]:** Tension, it creates the impression that although prepared something would happen

**Comment [YA7]:** Sympathy is felt because it is a hard challenge

**Comment [YA8]:** Tension is created as anticipation builds for the race

**Comment [YA9]:** Sympathy is felt as the strong emotive word portrays her frustration and nervousness

**Comment [YA10]:** The short sentence length creates tension.

**Comment [YA11]:** The danger of the situation is highlighted and the tension is built up by displaying that injuries were a real possibility.

**Comment [YA12]:** As it is described as "a world over which I had no control" tension is felt by the reader as anything could occur

**Comment [YA13]:** There is only one opportunity to do this and everything must be correct, we feel sympathy that it is such a difficult task

**Comment [YA14]:** There is a lack of control and anything could happen- builds tension

**Comment [YA15]:** The distance emphasizes how she is alone and isolated

**Comment [YA16]:** Personal struggle is heightened as she understands the difficult of the climb

**Comment [YA17]:** Tension is felt from the short sentence. Finality in "knew" arouses sympathy as there will only be one chance to do this

**Comment [YA18]:** A sense of small achievement.

**Comment [YA19]:** Sympathy as she must pull her own body weight as well as the halyard as her strength is waning. It also highlights the great struggle of the climb.

**Comment [YA20]:** Personification highlights the danger as it compares the mast to a knife

**Comment [YA21]:** Sympathy is felt at the image of desperation

**Comment [YA22]:** The struggle is highlighted as it paints a vivid image

**Comment [YA23]:** Unexpected and highlights the danger of the environment

By the third *spreader*<sup>5</sup> I was exhausted; the halyard was heavier and the motion more violent. I held on to her spreader base and hung there, holding tight to breathe more deeply and conjure up more energy. But I realised that the halyard was tight and that it had caught on something. I knew that if I went down to free it I would not have the energy to climb up once again. I tugged and tugged on the rope – the frustration was unreal. It had to come, quite simply the rope had to come free. Luckily with all the pulling I managed to create enough slack to make it to the top, but now I was even more exhausted. I squinted at the grey sky above me and watched the mast-head whip across the clouds. The wind whistled past us, made visible by the snow that had began to fall. Below the sea stretched out for ever, the size and length of the waves emphasised by this new aerial view. This is what it must look like to the albatross.

I rallied once more and left the safety of the final spreader for my last hike to the top. The motion was worse than ever, and as I climbed I thought to myself, not far now, kiddo, come on, just keep moving... As the mast-head came within reach there was a short moment of relief; at least there was no giving up now I had made it – whatever happened now I had the whole mast to climb down. I fumbled at the top of the rig, feeding in the halyard and connecting the other end to the top of *Kingfisher's* mast. The job only took half an hour – then I began my descent. This was by far the most dangerous part and I had my heart in my mouth – no time for complacency now, I thought, not till you reach the deck, kiddo, it's far from over...

It was almost four hours before I called Mark back and I shook with exhaustion as we spoke. We had been surfing at well over 20 knots while I was up there. My limbs were bruised and my head was spinning, but I felt like a million dollars as I spoke on the phone. Santa had called on *Kingfisher* early and we had the best present ever – a new halyard.

Ellen MacArthur

<sup>1</sup>*halyard*: a rope used for raising and lowering sails

<sup>2</sup>*sheet*: a line to control the sails

<sup>3</sup>*reef*: reduces area of sails

<sup>4</sup>*jumars*: a climbing device that grips the rope so that it can be climbed

<sup>5</sup>*spreader*: a bar attached to a yacht's mast

## Op's

1-Tension+danger

2-Personal struggle

3-Acheivment and relief

4-Sympathy

**Comment [YA24]:** Sympathy is aroused for her struggle

**Comment [YA25]:** Sympathy is felt because the task is getting harder as her strngth wanes and it highlights the danger as it becomes more violent.

**Comment [YA26]:** Tension as the audience wonders what has happened

**Comment [YA27]:** Certainty creates tension of what will happen

**Comment [YA28]:** Sympathy is felt because she is trying so hard and yet not succeeding

**Comment [YA29]:** Relief followed by sympathy and tension as it shows how although she was lucky enough to make it to the top, but was now more exhausted, makes the audience wonder how she can continue on

**Comment [YA30]:** A sense of achievement at having reached the top. Emphasizes the danger of the environment. "Stretched out for ever" creates a sense of isolation.

**Comment [YA31]:** Emphasizes danger of environment.

**Comment [YA32]:** Creates a sense of isolation as there is no one else to encourage her.

**Comment [YA33]:** Positive in contrast to before, highlights the relief felt

**Comment [YA34]:** Sense of achievement and relief that it went easily

**Comment [YA35]:** Tension is created from the ellipses which keeps the reader on edge as to whether she succeeds. The danger of the environment is once more highlighted.

**Comment [YA36]:** Sense of achievement as she succeeded while going at such a fast speed

**Comment [YA37]:** The danger of the environment s emphasized in her injuries but the sense of achievement is emphasized in "felt like a million dollars"