

Warrington Dolphins Long Distance Swimming Club

Dolphins Channel Warriors, Relay Team 2017 Report

Our turn had finally arrived, we boarded the Anastasia at 7am on Sunday morning 20th August. A sweet little name for the craft that was to see us through our channel relay 2017. Once on board we were introduced to the crew dressed in matching yellow T-shirts, very much the colour scheme for our trip. The boat had all the essential facilities, upstairs there was an outdoor deck and below, a toilet, kitchen and sleeping area; however, this area was wasted on most of the team who were confined to the deck, to keeping a close eye on the horizon. We were briefed on the safety aspects and swim drill, such as the takeover procedure, no breaststroke, no strapping, no unofficial costumes. We signed the waiver and the official bit was done. Just before we set sail the crew introduced us to the in-boat entertainment and the cute little yellow buckets. Bless them they had put on entertainment to stave off the boredom between swims. The order of swimmers was decided by our, Manager Andy, first in Jonathan Gatley then Faye Hodgkins, Julie Trevor, Barbara Harding, Karen Hodgkins and Mandy Reid. We were ready to go, Jonathan swam to land, gave those on board a wave and he was back in the water with official start time 8.21am. The weather was sunny and the sea a lovely clear blue. For the swimmers on board the 'Yellow bucket game began. This consisted of a party game akin to pass the parcel, snakes and ladders. It must have taken the crew many pain staking sailing hours to come up with such a captivating party game. The game was called 'Head in a yellow bucket' it is played with 6 mugs (although can be played with 4 or 5) The idea being 1 or 2 players close their eyes and shout out the names of the people that will have their head in a yellow bucket when the caller opens their eyes. If they get the names right they can dive or lunge towards the 'bucket head' and try and snatch the bucket off them and tip the contents into the sea. Once empty the 'bucket head' could decide to keep the bucket or pass it on. When we got better at the game the crew added an advanced level, seeing if we could still grab the bucket whilst they provided a roller coaster variation. This game was inclusive and no one was disappointed or left out, if you weren't holding a bucket or a bucket grabber you could still participate if you looked the colour of the crew T-shirts. Extra bonus points could be gained by, not only looking yellow but also trembling, rolling your eyes and in a near collapsed state. Brilliant! We had the hang of this game.

As you can tell it was a riveting game and once playing people didn't want to give up their yellow bucket status. Like, Monopoly the game lasted for ages and kept us going all trip; in fact, we only just finished as we docked. Where, do the snakes and ladders come in, I hear you say. Well there were ladders down to the galley; an out of bounds area for the bucket heads. If you were lucky enough and could make your way down the stairs without being sick you were able to make a brew, go to the loo. However, if you changed your mind and needed a bucket you had to make your way back up the ladders to retrieve your yellow bucket. We felt very proud to have, one player expert enough to grapple up the stairs on all fours before snatching a bucket and placing her head in it on the top rung. Extra bonus points for the team. Wonderful!

As if, this wasn't enough entertainment once in the water the game changed, this entailed seeing how many mouthfuls of sea water you could consume in one hour whilst swimming in a massive washing machine and dodging the yellow bucket contents being thrown at you from above. This was almost as challenging as the bucket head game. Once back on the boat after a swim, people seemed keener to join in the bucket head game and were getting more proficient being able to play standing up, sitting down or

sprawled on the floor whilst trying to get dressed. We really were becoming most proficient at this boat/swim challenge. Our expertise were shining through again, one player who was yellow and virtually, comatosed, still managed to get into a costume whilst clutching a yellow bucket. Wow! – professional statues.

Whilst all this on-board rivalry was going on Faye took over from Jonathan and swam for her hour. Then Julie, the wind and waves seemed to be increasing their tempo with each successive swimmer, by the time the later swimmers got in, the elements were having a field day, being slapped in the face with a wave from either side and taking in copious amounts of water was all part and parcel of the trip. As the weather was predicted to get worse the swim was aborted by the pilot after 2pm. We were gutted in more ways than one, all that training and build up and not to manage to get to France. We did our best and we were no yellow belly's it was just the wrong time on the wrong day and if Hurricane Gert, had been kinder, who knows what we could have achieved.

Taking on the positive we had a proper channel experience and we felt proud to have completed a 1/3rd of the channel on what, for most us was our first attempt. With the swim over we made the very choppy journey back to Dover.

However, the entertainment didn't stop there, as we travelled back, we had people chatting and laughing one minute and then the next they were prolapsed on the floor (David Jason, fools and horses style)

One swimmer risked eating egg mayo sandwiches next to a bucket head very risky business, if you don't want a clout. The overall ambidextrous skills of most of the team holding buckets, aiming fluids into the bucket from many orifices, whilst gripping the boat with the other, was hilarious.

For anyone contemplating a channel relay our advice would be to train in a wave pool, coastal sea training is just no match and don't forget to master the art of the 'bucket head' game, whilst performing some type of balancing act. If you get this sussed, the Channel will be a doddle.

We would like to thank our fellow team members for giving it their best shot and for the wonderful, synergy and camaraderie over the weekend. Thank you to Andy Wright, for managing the "Dolphins Channel Warriors", and especially for giving up his family time with new Granddaughter Isla born on the same weekend - Congratulations. Thank you to Rob Waterhouse you prepared and supported us all the way and for all those who played a part in getting us to the start line. We are sorry we just didn't make it this time.