



'Everywhere we looked we could see little flecks and pieces of plastic ...'

ALMOST ASHORE

— After 118 days at sea, **DAVID DE ROTHSCHILD** talks to *Laetitia Cash* about his *Plastiki* journey.

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ABOVE: You've now crossed nearly the entire South Pacific, with just ten days to go before docking in Sydney [25th July]. How are you feeling?

DDR: Arriving in New Caledonia has been a culture shock. I sat to have dinner with the crew the first

night here and we were looking at each other saying we are back in civilisation – everyday life – with WiFi and air-conditioned buildings.

ABOVE: I hear the last leg of the journey, to Sydney, could be the most dangerous.

DDR: We are heading off in a very treacherous time in some ways. As it's winter here, getting into Sydney is going to be nigh impossible because of the way the headwinds come into Sydney Harbour.

ABOVE: You've said the 1950s *Kontiki* expedition was the inspiration for *Plastiki* – how different do you think are the experiences of these two

expeditions?

DDR: I would have liked to mimic the remoteness of the *Kontiki* expedition but I think nowadays exploration is much more about understanding and sharing the exploring with a community that is immersed in that. What has been extraordinary and inspiring has been the instantaneous flow of feedback. If something happens, like the headsail rips and you tweet, within 15 minutes you

walk back inside and you have got 20 people writing comments and 10 people telling you how to fix it.

ABOVE: How was the sleep deprivation?

DDR: I have spent the last three months being up every three hours. I spend a lot of time looking at stars – it is magical at night because all the sea life comes out.

ABOVE: What's your favourite crew moment?

DDR: When there is a big downpour and I have looked over the decks and all of a sudden everybody's running around naked – blokes all standing around waiting for the rain or sitting on deck, wanting to make the most of a freshwater shower. You are living in a very small space so it's very hot and sweaty. Most of the time we are naked. I have a saltwater shower every day at the front of the boat.

ABOVE: What's the closest you've come to an emergency?

DDR: One of the biggest things to worry about is someone falling overboard. If you fall overboard it's basically death, because we don't have an engine so it's very hard to turn the boat around and you lose someone very quickly. There have been moments when the seascape has picked up and there have been massive waves crashing down on the vessel, and it would be unnatural if it didn't cross your mind – the "what ifs" – but actually you are so consumed by the moment, the "what ifs" disappear very quickly.

ABOVE: What do you think about

dealing with the consequences of 100 years of plastic waste?

DDR: The four main items ending up in our oceans are plastic bags, styrofoam cups, styrofoam containers, and plastic bottles that [the *Plastiki* is] using for flotation, as a symbol of reuse. First and foremost this is a story about the vitality of our oceans and the misuse of our oceans. Seventy-two per cent of our planet is covered by water, so we have used this scale to hide some of the most horrific exploitation of our era – we have used the depths of our oceans as a landfill. When we were half way across the Pacific a thousand miles from any major landmass. It was a low-wind day and we decided to drop the sails and launch ourselves into the deep blue. We were swimming around and pretty much everywhere we looked we could see little flecks and pieces of plastic – you could push your hand in front of your face and capture these little pieces of plastic floating sub-surface. This pollution is a kind of soup of plastic that lives in the life layer.

ABOVE: How bad do you believe humanity's relationship with nature has become?

DDR: I do believe there are solutions to the problems we are facing today, but because our system is tied to our economy we are not going to solve these problems in a hurry. By cutting down trees, by creating vast waste and pollution for short-term profit, we are now paying the price of raiding the larder. The only way is to replace the old system with new economic incentives.

Under the auspices of his Adventure Ecology project, David de Rothschild set sail on the *Plastiki* in March 2010, partly to generate new thinking about recycling plastic as a multi-use, valuable resource. The 12,500 reclaimed plastic bottles in the hull of the 20-metre catamaran are filled with dry ice, providing 70% of the *Plastiki's* buoyancy. The mast is reclaimed aluminium irrigation pipe, and the sail handmade from recycled PET plastic. During the Pacific crossing, the *Plastiki's* six-man crew desalinated seawater for drinking, and they used solar and wind-turbine power which enabled them to tweet and blog their adventure.