

THE MERCY (film). A British biographical drama, directed by James Marsh, written by Scott Z Burns and starring Colin Firth, Rachel Weisz, David Thewlis and Ken Stott.

With the resurrection of the Golden Globe Race comes the release of a film called *The Mercy*, which tells the extraordinary tale of Donald Crowhurst's bid for fame and fortune in the first Golden Globe singlehanded non-stop race around the world. Starring Colin Firth and Rachel Weisz, it's a disturbing journey through the deteriorating state of mind of a man who set out to win everything and realises he is about to lose everything instead.

The reviews have been mixed, but for sailors, especially those old enough to have followed the original story or read the subsequent excellent account in *Voyage for Madmen*, it's a must-see. Soon after setting off in *Teignmouth Electron*, Crowhurst realises that the 41ft trimaran is not up to the task. Yet having wagered everything, including his house and his business, he cannot quit. He must keep going.

The boat leaks and he uses a bucket to empty the outriggers. He survives a storm under bare poles. When he comes to accept that his boat will not survive the pounding of the high latitudes, and desperate to win the £5000 prize money that will save him from bankruptcy, he concocts a means of reporting his position by plotting a course he imagines would put him in the lead. With this, the media create a sensation around his story. His mental state cracks in the horse latitudes when he makes no progress. He knows he won't stand up to the scrutiny if he does come in first, so he slows himself down to come in last – except that Moitessier decides he doesn't want the fame and keeps going, and Nigel Tetley drives his boat so hard that she breaks up and sinks. Only young Robin Knox-Johnston in the much smaller and slower *Suhaili* remains in the race, the only sailor to cross the line. Unable to deal with the fallout, Crowhurst breaks and decides to seek 'the Mercy'. His boat is found adrift with no-one on board, leaving behind a great mystery and infamy.

I thought *The Mercy* was very well acted and would not be surprised if there were several Oscar nominations. Despite being a story of more than seven months spent drifting around the Atlantic, it was fast-paced and the end came sooner than expected. I'd forgotten that Honorary OCC Member Knox-Johnston donated his winnings to Crowhurst's widow and children – the scenes of him crossing the finishing line at Falmouth is actual footage from the real race.

For sailors in general it won't be a joyful experience. For racers, it may reveal some of the inner struggles that propel them to the start line and across the finish.

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