

BOOK REVIEWS

THE FIRST INDIAN – Dilip Donde. Published in soft covers by Fernhurst Books [www.fernhurstbooks.com] at £10.99; Kindle edition £10.44. 304 128mm x 197mm pages, including eight pages of colour photos. ISBN 978-1-9099-1149-9

In 2006 the Department of Sports and Adventure Activities of the Indian Navy was kicking around the idea of sponsoring a solo circumnavigation by a naval officer. Commander Donde saw the opportunity and ran with it – the right man in the right place and time. A few other Indian sailors were cruising in sailing boats, but none had so far undertaken a solo circumnavigation south of the three great capes. Initially having no clear idea of the magnitude of the task he was taking on, he met the successive challenges with enthusiasm, patience and humour. His family were behind him and he also gained the support of good friends and mentors from the world of ocean sailing and the naval hierarchy.

Commander Donde did not have to seek funding for the project, but instead faced a constant battle to put that money to the best use in acquiring the other vital ingredient – the boat. He was fortunate in his choice of boatbuilder and together they learned ‘on the job’; producing a hull with the structural integrity to inspire confidence and the looks to cheer the heart. *Mhadei* did them proud. From a standing start, the project gained momentum as the yacht was fitted out with the thousand and one pieces of gear that transform a bare hull into a going concern. These items had to be sourced from far and wide, a logistical headache of the first order not aided by the many obstacles raised by a slow-moving and often obstructive bureaucracy. At the same time, Commander Donde was struggling to get the ocean-going experience he needed. The story of his three years of effort makes for an entertaining read.

The second part of the story, the actual voyage, is mainly a recap of his blog, posted en route. Finally, the frustrations of preparation were left behind as man and boat took on the new challenges of wind and sea. Sails blew into streamers and there were some gear failures – though not many considering the distance sailed, and none disastrous. Deadlines were met and expectations more than fulfilled during a voyage which Commander Donde tackled with adventurous and infectious enthusiasm. The title is apt!

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