

Jesse
Martin

The Journey of Kijana

by Briar Jensen

You're 20 years old; you're the youngest person to have circumnavigated the globe solo, non-stop and unassisted; you've written a best selling book and produced a documentary that has screened around the world. What do you do next? If you're Australian Jesse Martin, you gather some of your mates, get a larger boat and set sail again. Why? Just for the fun of it, of course.

When Jesse was 14, he dreamed of sailing around the world, "I could imagine sailing to exotic ports, meeting people, swimming in crystal-clear water, diving and catching fish. It would be fabulous."

However, his first circumnavigation, completed in 1999 when he was just 18, was non-stop, solo and unassisted and put him in the record books as the youngest sailor to achieve this feat. During that trip Jesse continued to dream, inspired by books about the places he was passing by. ("While others may turn to alcohol or drugs, I retreat to the recesses of my mind ... Dreaming is my drug.") Even before the trip was finished, he was already planning the next one, "For the last three months of the voyage I spent every moment I could in front of the computer documenting and putting

into words my vision for the next trip. That proposal was finished before I got home ..."

However, before Jesse could embark on his new dream, he had to repay his mother, who had mortgaged her house to pay for *Lionheart*, the boat used for his circumnavigation. Within a year the book, '*Lionheart - A journey of the human spirit*', was published and has now sold over 100,000 copies, with releases in the USA and UK scheduled for 2002. The following year '*Lionheart: The Jesse Martin Story*' was released on video. Filmed by Jesse during his trip, it has been screened in more than 120 countries.

But documenting his journey was not just for the money, "Before I left I was just following my heart, I was following an impulse, a feeling. I didn't understand what it all meant." However, seeing the public's response upon his return, (25,000 people lined the shores of his home yacht club) Jesse began to realize his trip had touched many people. The process of writing the book enabled him to understand why.

Before he had finished his solo trip, Jesse was asked to become an ambassador for a youth organization called Reach, which he did. Since then he has spent many hours in schools, at youth courses and on camps, motivating young people to believe in themselves and follow their dreams.

Despite his modest and unassuming nature (or perhaps because of), Jesse has become an influential role model - a modern hero to today's youth. While this was never his intention, he values the role he now finds himself in and is determined to put it to good use, "I see myself in a privileged position ... I realize I am in a position of responsibility to make a positive impact on the lives of many people." Leading by example, as all good role models should, Jesse is turning his latest dream into reality.

The Journey of Kijana

On 10th March, Jesse and a crew of four left Melbourne, Victoria, aboard Kijana (Swahili for 'young people') on the start of a two-year land and sea adventure that could never be described as a leisurely cruise. The aim of '*The Journey of Kijana*' is to have fun while sailing to remote and exotic locations, exploring the environment, and interacting with the local people. It has been described as 'A celebration of youth, discovery and the human spirit within us all'.

Fun is definitely on the agenda with a list of off-boat activities would leave most of us breathless. There are plans to surf in Indonesia, snowboard in the Himalayas, trek across Africa, raft down the Congo, paraglide among the mountains of Peru and scuba dive off the Galapagos.

The crew will also share their unique view of the world with us, via their web site, a global classroom and 13-part documentary to be released progressively throughout the trip.

The Crew

Jesse, now 20, is the skipper and director of the television series. He has been documenting his adventures since his kayaking trip to Papua New Guinea with brother Beau, then aged 16 and 14 respectively. "It's exciting to see your work concentrated into something you can portray to other people. And it pays for the next trips." He also has another responsibility, "My biggest contribution will be as dreamer, so will somebody else change the sails because I need my sleep!"

Brother Beau, 18, with whom Jesse has shared many other adventures, will be both chef and photographer. Beau left school at 14 and did three years of a chef apprenticeship while studying photography. He is also an avid snowboarder and skater and has travelled extensively.

Mika Tran, 23 and Josh Schmidt, 21 are both compatriots of Jesse's from Reach. With experience in writing, acting and paragliding, Mika will be writing for the documentary, web site and education program. Josh is the resident comic as well as director of photography. "I love having fun and running amok. There's not much in this world that I can't laugh at." Josh is also an actor as well as award-winning short filmmaker. Prior to joining *Kijana*, Mika, who gets motion sickness in elevators, had only sailed once before, when she was a little girl, and Josh's only claims to seafaring involve a ferry and a cruise ship. But Jesse felt confident in their ability to learn and chose them because they are 'soul mates' that can all hang out together without having to talk.

The fifth crew position was advertised around the world and only filled shortly before departure. Nicolette Fendon, 22, from Michigan, USA, won the spot because of her conviction to adventure as well as her skills, which include training as a rafting instructor, auto mechanic, opera singer and actor. She also has experience in diving, kayaking, and rock climbing. Her roles on board are mechanic and activities coordinator.

Preparation

As one journalist put it, the Journey of *Kijana* seems "ridiculously ambitious," but Jesse has been planning this for a long time, drawing on his experiences pre and post circumnavigation. Unlike the *Lionheart* trip, where help came mostly from family and friends, preparation for this trip has involved the establishment of a

company to manage and direct the project. Surrounding himself with a team of professionals, Jesse has provided the motivation, injecting the team with a healthy and infectious dose of youthful enthusiasm.

The land-based team is headed by Jesse's business partner and production manager and includes a project manager, boat manager (Jesse's father Kon), education coordinator, researcher, writers and publicity coordinator. Having this support network meant the crew could concentrate on learning and developing their own skills. This involved courses in celestial navigation, boat maintenance, first aid, rescue diving, and computer editing programs as well as sailing lessons for Mika and Josh.

Although Jesse has been able to finance part of this multi-million dollar project with revenue from his book and video, and the anticipated sale of his boat *Lionheart*, (www.go4.com.au/lionheart/index.htm) sponsorship was still a necessity.

Despite the scale of the project and the risks involved, major sponsors were secured in the key areas of communication, electronic equipment and boat insurance.

The Route

After a shakedown cruise from Melbourne to Sydney (during which the crew managed to block the toilet and



break the stove) they continued up the east coast of Australia and on to Papua New Guinea, where they plan to trek into never before filmed areas of rainforest.

They will then sail to the Kimberly region of northwestern Australia to spend several weeks immersing themselves in Aboriginal life. From there they will island hop through Indonesia and sail on to Sri Lanka and India, where they will leave the boat and hike to the Himalayan mountains to snowboard.

From India they will sail to Madagascar, via the Maldives, and on to Tanzania, where they will hand Kijana to another crew for delivery round the Cape of Good Hope (possibly skippered by Jesse's father) while they travel overland. They will spend three weeks living with a tribe of pygmies before rafting down the Congo to meet Kijana.

After crossing the Atlantic they will sail up the Amazon River, visiting local tribes along the riverbank. Then it's on to the Caribbean where they plan to visit Bob Marley's grave and throw a reggae party aboard *Kijana*. The journey home will include stops at the Galapagos, Easter and Pitcairn Islands, as well as numerous islands throughout Polynesia. However, this exhausting itinerary is open to change should it take the crew's fancy.

The Boat

Initially Jesse had planned to take "An old style 46-foot Polynesian catamaran built of timber with two gaff rigged sails." Once planning progressed, other options were considered including a 70-foot replica of a Brigantine, which Jesse would have loved, but the cost and legalities (permits and licenses) made prohibitive.

After months of searching, Jesse finally decided on a 54-foot cutter-rigged ketch, which he found in Brisbane, Queensland. Built of kauri and tallow wood, Jesse said, "She made my heart flutter when I stepped on her teak deck for the first time."

Built about 10 years ago in New Zealand to an old American East Coast fishing boat design, its previous owner-builder, a shipwright, sailed it around the Pacific with his wife until arthritis forced him to sell it. Costing in the vicinity of AUD\$200,000, Jesse describes it as "A romantic looking boat with banana lines sitting her low in the water and carving her through the waves."

The richly paneled interior has the galley located to port of the companionway and the nav station to starboard. Immediately forward of the galley is the U-shaped dinette with a settee opposite. The forward cabin

has two berths, while the aft cabin, which is accessed via the cockpit, has a double. The 75 HP diesel is located between the aft and main cabins.

The delivery from Brisbane to their home port of Melbourne, enabled the crew and Jesse's father Kon, to assess the modifications required. It was also a chance for non-sailors Josh and Mika to get some coastal sailing experience – not all of it pleasant. "I found myself head over the side, body shaking, terrified that I would be sea sick forever," said Josh. "In my dreams of sailing the world I never pictured boxes of travel calm pills."

Refit and Equipment

Due to the power requirements of the electronic equipment on board, two wind generators were fitted along with six solar panels. A new battery system was installed and the electrical wiring redone. Safe storage for the electronic equipment was another priority and the stove was changed from gas to kerosene. The boat

was also re-rigged and new polyester sails added in a striking shade of dark-red called Tan Bark.

Jesse, who completed his solo voyage using no fossil fuels, was determined to use celestial navigation for this trip. Consequently, he had the boat's existing navigational equipment removed, and will only carry an EPIRB in the grab bag.

In order to relay their adventure to as wide an audience as possible, the crew is taking state of the art equipment including a satellite phone, two GAN (Global Area Network) satellite terminals, UHF and HF radios, three laptops, two digital video cameras and one underwater camera.

Documentary and Global Classroom

An interactive on-line classroom has been developed to school curriculum standard and will provide students with a fresh view on issues of culture, ecology, science, the environment and personal development. However, anyone can participate in the journey through the *Kijana* web site, which has live on-line crosses and chat rooms.

The documentary, which has been described as a cross between David Attenborough and 'Survivor,' aims to entertain, inform and inspire. "A lot of people," says Jesse, "don't live their dreams, whether it be to sail around the world or buy a restaurant, because the reality of it is miscommunicated, through family, school, TV and the media." Jesse hopes to break down that misconception and show that it is possible to achieve



your dreams, whoever you are and whatever your age. Splicing, scripting and editing of episodes will take place on board, as each stage of the journey is completed, before they are flown home for release.

The Research

This voyage provides a unique opportunity for gathering valuable data and a number of organizations and institutions have requested the crew's help. Consequently, they will be recording details of their body fat, measuring water quality and documenting sightings of dolphins and whales. They will also be visiting the children they sponsor (through child-focused aid agency Plan), in remote villages around the world.

The Challenges

As with any trip of such magnitude, there are many things that could go wrong and each of the crew has their own fears. For Beau it's the little things like "Catching a bug and getting sick for a week." Nicolette is mostly concerned about pirates and "Being in situations where, as a female, I'll feel vulnerable."

Questioned as to whether traveling up the Amazon was wise following the recent murder of New Zealander Sir Peter Blake aboard his boat there, Jesse's reply was swift and definitive, "He wouldn't have got killed if he didn't have a gun." Josh was quick to add, "People get murdered in the city more than the Amazon."

For Jesse, who is ultimately responsible for the team and the boat, there are many concerns, including theft. However, he tries not to think about them too much as it "clusters your head." He hopes to avoid too many boat problems by treating *Kijana* as he did *Lionheart*, by not pushing her too hard and anticipating problems before they occur.

While Mika says, "...We are going to come across some dangers and we've got no control over it," this crew has researched almost every possible eventuality and are probably more prepared than most cruisers.

Comradeship

No one sees crew harmony as a problem. While they expect there will be disagreements, they believe they can be overcome by talking them through. Their sense of humour will no doubt help too. As Nicolette says, "We have a tendency to take serious things and joke the hell out of them."

While Josh is looking forward to 'sleeping' with Jesse, the crew doesn't anticipate any relationships developing. "We are all working together," says Mika, "its not like we are on holiday together." As they pointed out, there's not a lot of room for romance when you're sharing the same toilet bucket (which they dub the 'lady loo'). Josh plans on using the Play Station to take care of his sexual tensions, although exactly how, he didn't elaborate.



The Highlights

Just as the crew bring diverse perspectives to the journey, so they are all looking forward to different aspects of the trip. For Mika it's "Meeting different people, especially children," and Nicolette is looking forward to "Seeing other cultures and how they interact." Beau is eager to visit India and take photos in the Amazon while, for Josh it's an island where he can "Sit on a beach - no civilization, get a tan, watch the sun." And Jesse, well he is looking forward to "Getting away from the trappings of western society ... to becoming self sufficient as a crew and doing our own thing."

Despite all the media coverage, Jesse, who received the Medal of the Order of Australia earlier this year for his achievements in sport and volunteer work, remains unaffected and humble. On his departure from Melbourne he said, "I feel like the luckiest person, because I just do what I want and I get all of this help." But this belies the enormous effort Jesse has put into the project - the long hours and personal sacrifice.

Still thinking of others, his parting words to the well-wishers in Sydney were, "I hope you enjoy it [the trip] as much as we do, through the web site."

Join Jesse and his crew for the Journey of *Kijana* at www.kijana.net.

