

SVB in an interview with Hugo Picard aka *The Sailing Frenchman*

SVB: Why sailing?

Hugo: I can't really explain why I like sailing so much. I grew up in the mountains and love skiing and mountaineering as well. I have travelled a lot and worked in many different places, had many different hobbies. But for some reason, I always come back to sailing. Sailing is pure freedom, it's unforgiving and intense, and this quote of Eric Tabarly sums it up quite well: "You can't bluff with sailing. In many professions you can bluff your way through. On a sailboat, you know or you don't"

Original quote: "Naviguer est une activité qui ne convient pas aux imposteurs. Dans bien des professions, on peut faire illusion et bluffer en toute impunité. En bateau, on sait ou on ne sait pas."

SVB: Why skip the job you had before?

Hugo: I bought my first boat, *Ann Alé* (I actually exchanged it for a beer) when I was 23 and still in university. I lived on the boat while refitting her. I started to dream about a transatlantic, but I needed more funds to make her ocean worthy, so I took one contract after another, working abroad for the UN. 2 weeks before what was to be my last mission before going back to the boat for a refit and go for the Atlantic, I had a motorbike accident, quite bad, after 6 months of hospital, rehabilitation...etc, I had to go back to work to replenish the boat fund, so I went back to the UN. One year after, I had the budget, flew back to France and started working on *Ann Alé* to cross the Atlantic a few month later. I felt like it was the moment to do it, I had some money, no strings attached and a lot of energy.

Don't get me wrong, I loved my job as project coordinator for the UN, I learned a lot and met so many amazing people, but somehow, I was feeling like I had to leave on this big adventure. It's been 5 years since I took this decision and I haven't left the sea. I don't know what tomorrow will bring, but I want to spend today on a sailing boat.

SVB: Why SVB?

Hugo: As mentioned before, I started to sail cruising, then work as skipper on charter boats before finding my way in offshore racing. I knew that the road would be tough, and that the management of a racing project would take lots of time on shore, behind a computer, working on fundraising, communication...etc. Luckily, I had been investing a great deal of time in the media side of my project and with a decent social media presence; I was feeling relatively confident that I would find partners to follow me on this project.

One year after, I sent thousands of emails to companies to present my project, and my savings were extinguished. I ticked every box, that is, I had a boat, proved myself on the offshore racing championship, qualified to the Mini Transat... but to my despair, I was not be able to get to the Transat... And that's when SVB got in touch with me, they were probably one of the few companies in Europe that I had not reached out to already.

I'm really happy and honored to be able to start this partnership with SVB. They know what they're doing, having sponsored a team on the Youth AC before, and most importantly they love sailing. Thanks to them, I am not only able to be on the start line of the Mini Transat, I am able to do so optimising the performance side of my project. Their resources and competence in the sector are priceless and it is amazing to have someone who believes in my project as much as I do.

SVB: Why the Mini Transat?

Hugo: The Mini class and the Mini Transat are legendary in the offshore sailing community... or at least the French one. Among the 33 skippers to take the start of the last Vendée Globe, 19 have raced the Mini Transat at least once. This says a lot about this race and its importance in becoming an offshore race carrier. Small boat, minimal budget, but big race and even bigger dreams of competition and adventure.

The "mini family" is also an amazing community, gathering sailors from all walks of life, age, motivation, skills...etc. It's great to be able to share, interact and race with such a diverse group, the learning curve is steep, but rewarding, and so are the unofficial debriefs after the races 😊

SVB: What is so fascinating about single-hand sailing? / What is difficult?

Hugo: In a Mini Transat campaign, it's not only the sailing that is single-handed, it's the whole project. Because of the minimal budget of the race and its amateur status, you are a technician, project manager, head of communication, boat captain, fund-raising specialist, performance analyst, logistician, media-man... and skipper, all at the same time.

For me, the whole project can be a bit overwhelming at times, but as soon as I cast off lines, with no phone (phones or any other means of communication except VHF are forbidden onboard a mini), emails and deadlines, when the noises of land start to fade out, then I really remember why I am doing this.

You're not really solo, it's you and your boat. When I feel lonely I often say "we" and people ask me "who's we" ... well it's *Kirauccassis* (now called SVB Team) and myself. We have our things, our routine, we take care of each other. Once you are far out at sea, your boat and yourself are the only things you can count on. Some find it scary, I find it exhilarating; in our interconnected societies, being in control of your close environment and actions is a rare gift.

SVB: What were the problems you had to face?

Hugo: Problems on a boat, and especially on a racing boat are a daily thing. I believe that to be a successful offshore racing skipper, you have to be able to solve and deal with those problems, just as much as you have to be a good sailor.

Problems can be technical, it's a mechanical sport after all and so there are many moving parts. And as you're exposed to one of the hardest environments on earth, these tend to break. But problems also come from the mix between the race, a fixed set of rules (start and finish lines, and the need to be as

fast as possible) and the sea, which has its own time, flow and moods. From this mix come many problems, most often it's that the wind is coming from the wrong angle or not the right strength, so you need to choose your sails correctly, get your strategy right, decide when to go fast and burn energy, or slow a little and get some rest. You can go fast, hanging on the helm, or take a break and eat something warm to get some energy. Really few sports and environments can offer you this chance of discovering yourself so much as sailing at sea can, especially racing single handed.

SVB: Differences between single-hand sailing and team sailing?

Hugo: Both have their challenges. With team sailing, coaching and interaction is key, finding the skills of each individual and finding an organisational pattern where the sum of the experience of each crew is greater than just the number of people onboard. Sailing with a team you can push the boat to its limit 24/7, part of the crew being able to rest while the guys on watch keep sending it.

Single-handed is really different, a successful solo sailor is the one who manages to go the fastest doing the least. It's difficult to find the balance between resting enough to keep your mind clear for strategic decisions, but not too much so that your hand slips on the throttle and you lose pace with the competition. Sailing solo, you can leave no stone unturned, every detail counts and you are the only one who can take care of those details. Relying on luck isn't an option, luck is a bonus. Work, training, control, repetition and more work are the only thing that will pay off in the end.

SVB: What are your 3 top goals?

Hugo: On the sailing side, I want to become a better sailor. Perform well in the Mini Transat is obviously a start, but not an end. My circumnavigation was interrupted last year because of the COVID crisis, so this is a box that still has to be ticked off. Of course, the Class 40 and IMOCA class seem amazing platforms which appeal me a lot. This is a distant dream for now since my attention has to focus on the Mini.

On the life side, I'd like to have a positive impact on the world, I'm looking forward to having some time off next year to be able to volunteer for causes I believe in, for Sea Shepherd for example. I'm also keeping a watchful eye on how the development of companies shipping freight by sailboats goes. I love the idea and will be attracted towards this at some point... but first I have some racing to do.

That's two only... I'll try to find a 3rd one 😊