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Thinking Small, Sailor Hopes to Cruise Globe in 10-Foot Boat

Swedish Boatbuilder Is Creating 'Survival Capsule'; Packing Books, Sardines

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By ANNA MOLIN

A veteran boat-builder and sailor from Sweden is building a 10-foot boat that he will use to sail around the world without docking on land a single time. WSJ's Anna Molin spends some time with him and finds out why he's doing it.

Sven Yrvind is willing to pay a big price for some alone time.

The Swedish sailor wants to cruise nonstop around the world by himself in a sailboat slightly larger than a bathtub.

Armed with a stack of books and 880 pounds of mainly sardines and granola, the 73-year-old seasoned boat builder plans to wedge inside what he affectionately calls a "survival capsule," and spend up to a year-and-a-half reading, writing, thinking and soaking up the wonders of nature. Mr. Yrvind is knee deep in the building of his boat.



Enlarge Image

Anna Molin/The Wall Street Journal

Sven Yrvind shows off his 10-foot boat under construction in his shop.

If successful, he will win the honor of using the smallest—and probably slowest—boat ever to circle the world without docking. "I'll be completely safe. It's like a ping-pong ball in the sea, it never breaks," Mr. Yrvind said while showing the boat in his workshop. "A small boat constructed the right way is always stronger than a big boat."

Skeptics wonder if Mr. Yrvind will go crazy living on a small piece of real estate and question whether a boat this size would be able to hack it should it bump into a whale or iceberg.



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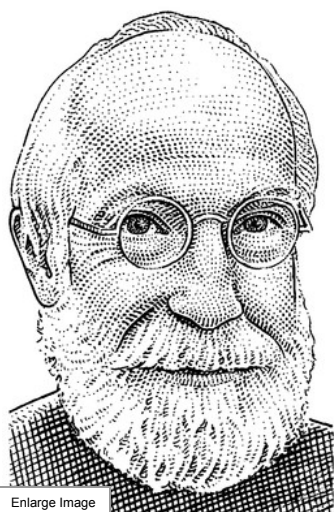
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But Mr. Yrvind's closest friends say the move is entirely expected from a man with 50 years of sailing experience.

"I would have been more worried if he retired into his apartment to watch TV," said Thomas Grahn, a 25-year-old sailor who traveled with Mr. Yrvind to Florida in 2007. "Of course there are risks, but one of the challenges is to minimize the risks by making a

foolproof construction, and he's the most competent small-boat builder that I know."

Mr. Yrvind, who sports a long white beard, keeps a meticulous training and dietary schedule. Almost every day, residents of the Swedish town Vastervik can see him either bike, climb a local hilltop, paddle his kayak or go for a six-mile run. He does six chin-ups a day and keeps his calories in check by eating two daily meals and snacking on fruit. At sea, his diet will consist mainly of granola, sardines and rainwater—with the rare mackerel treat.



Enlarge Image
Sven Yrvind

Raised in a sailing family, he became known for building kayak-length boats for solo sailing. In 1980, he was awarded the Seamanship Medal by the U.K.-based Royal Cruising Club for single-handedly navigating a 20-foot vessel around the stormy waters of Cape Horn, at the southern tip of Chile. Seven years later, he was elected into the New England-based Museum of Yachting's Hall of Fame for single-handed sailors.

He invented the Bris sextant, a thumbnail-size angle-measuring instrument used by ocean travelers and backpackers for navigation. His latest 45-day trip, in fall 2011, took him across the Atlantic in a 16-foot self-made boat, the viability of which was also questioned before the

successful journey.

This time, Mr. Yrvind wants to push the limits with a vessel of a mere 10 feet—less than half the size of the boat that in 2010 set the current record for being the smallest to circumnavigate the globe nonstop.

Made out of composite materials, the "Yrvind 10" is designed to weigh 1½ tons, have a rounded 6-foot bow and stern and feature two sails. The width-to-length ratio, the rounded edges and a heavy center of gravity—with the floor stuffed with books and food packed in watertight containers—should quickly right the boat should it flip, Mr. Yrvind said.

"It will capsize, it will pitchpole, but it will always come back up," Mr. Yrvind said while demonstrating how he plans to strap himself in a seat belt at the bottom of a 31-inch bed to combat thrusts from the waves. "No matter how it twists and turns, I'll be lying here calmly reading."

At deck, a big rope tied around his waist will keep him attached to the boat at all times, even when going for an occasional dip in cold waters.

The journey of some 30,000 nautical miles is slated to commence on Ireland's southern tip, travel past South Africa and sail eastbound south of Australia. This includes a full circumnavigation around the stormy Southern Ocean and past Cape Horn, where nearby the so-called Roaring Forties—the strong winds at 40 degrees latitude—can whip up 32-foot waves and winds that make sailing in an open vessel akin to sticking your head out of a car window at high speeds. The waters around

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the Cape are particularly challenging with strong currents and the risk of icebergs having led some sailors to their death.

As if that wasn't challenging enough, this Swede wants to complete the roundabout without making any pit stops to rest or stock up on supplies. A few sailor friends have promised to bring fruit at sea, but Mr. Yrvind—who was born Sven Lundin and later changed his last name to Yrvind, which translates to "whirlwind" in English—hardly expects to see a single soul.

"It's what I'm looking for—the solitude and peacefulness," he said.

The project is also a criticism against what Mr. Yrvind, who likes to think of himself as a modern-day Henry David Thoreau, describes as an excessive consumption-driven culture that risks depleting the world's natural resources.

Beyond the solitude, Mr. Yrvind loves the feeling of being in control of a seemingly uncontrollable situation.

"If one man can live in a 3-meter boat for over a year at sea, then surely the world can live on fewer resources than it is today," he said. "Of course, it would be nice to set a world record at 73," he concedes with a wink.

Mr. Yrvind hopes to let fans monitor his whereabouts via a tracker on his website. He also plans to take advantage of modern-day technology another way: by bringing a pedal-power generator that he will squeeze into the boat's microscopic "living room," he will be able to generate power that can charge an e-book reader. That could give him access to 100,000 titles or so, "a dream scenario" for the author of four books on sailing. And he will bring about 220 pounds of conventional books. "I plan to make a journey to the higher spiritual spheres, and there I won't be alone. A hundred kilos of well-chosen nonfiction books written by the world's biggest thinkers will guide me," he said.

Write to Anna Molin at anna.molin@dowjones.com

A version of this article appeared October 25, 2012, on page A1 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Thinking Small, Sailor Hopes To Cruise Globe in 10-Foot Boat.

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