



Around the world, non-stop, single-handed at age 75

Saito Challenge 8

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Minoru Saito, 73, Japan's Living Legend of the Sea

Multiple Record-Setting Voyage No. 8 is Next on His Limitless Horizon

Veteran blue-water sailor Minoru Saito has participated three times in the most prestigious and grueling race in the yachting world, the single-handed, around-the-globe competition originally called the BOC Challenge, then Around Alone, and most recently the 5-Oceans Race. He has started and finished seven solo circumnavigations of the Earth, the last in 2005 completed non-stop, garnering several international honors and world records along the way.

In his continuing sailing career, now at age 73 [74 on Jan. 7], Saito has become the most experienced single-handed yachtsman in the history of small-craft sailing with transoceanic voyages totaling more than 265,000 nautical miles — virtually the exact distance to the moon.

He is currently preparing for voyage No. 8, which commences in October 2008 from Yokohama, Japan. He will be 75 when he returns approximately 6 months and 26,000 nautical miles later, a feat that promises to make virtually unbeatable his standing as the world's oldest and most-accomplished single-handed circumnavigator. He'll hold records for most (8), oldest (75), most non-stop (2) and oldest westward "contrary" route circumnavigations.

Forced last year to retire his much beloved but weary 50-foot racing yacht *Shuten-Dohji II*, Saito recently acquired his next blue-water cruiser, a 56-foot, steel-hulled yacht built in Hawaii in 1989. A vessel was required that would be strong enough to carry him on his most demanding single-handed challenge yet: a westward voyage against the spin of the planet, and thus against the prevailing winds, seas, and currents. Only a handful of sailors have succeeded in a "contrary route" circumnavigation, and none even approaching Saito's venerable age.

Off the water, Saito resides in a nation surrounded by ocean. Yet with virtually no yachting tradition in Japan, sailing sponsors are hard to find, so he has typically supported his efforts through monthly social security payments and volunteer help. This time sponsors and an international support committee were needed to help him find – and finance – a vessel big and tough enough to survive the near-constant pounding of a non-stop westward voyage.

Several businesses have already signed on, including as main sponsor Nicole BMW, the top award-winning BMW dealership in Japan. (The newly acquired boat carries the name "Nicole BMW *Shuten-Dohji*.") Sub-sponsors are still actively being sought, and currently include Clearpoint High Definition Weather, a US-based marine weather forecasting service, Albion, a leading Japanese cosmetics company, Barilla Japan, an importer of Italian food products, and several individual donors.

Saito has been recognized internationally in sailing magazines and organizations in the U.S., Europe, and Australia. In January 2007 he received the Blue Water Medal of the Cruising

Club of America to a standing ovation by its salty members, a recognition considered the top international prize for adventure sailing. He thus became the first Asian to win the highly vaunted prize in its 84-year history. He also was inducted in 2006 into the Single-handed Sailing Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island, joining such historic figures as Joshua Slocum and Sir Robin Knox-Johnston (a personal friend and the first ever non-stop single-handed circumnavigator).

In either English or Japanese Saito tells stories that most people can only imagine, such as rounding South America's Cape Horn in a shrieking gale, surviving a complete roll-over of his 50-foot vessel in storm-tossed seas hundreds of miles from help, munching ship-grown radish sprouts as the only remaining vegetable, or finishing one solo race literally single-handed as he nursed a badly fractured finger in the final two weeks.

It is this fortitude that has made Saito widely respected as one of the world's outstanding "Corinthian" sailors, a term that describes competitive and adventure sailing at its earliest roots, when solo voyagers challenged the seas in wind-driven vessels equipped with just the basics of navigation and safety aids. They trusted instead on seamanship, courage, and hard-won experience.

Despite his gray hair, diminutive size (barely topping 135 pounds on a 5-foot-5 frame), Saito offers up an image of youthful vitality not just to Japan, but to the entire world. Others of his generation are well into their retirement years while Saito has his mind turned to his next voyage into the record books. Yet when questioned why he again wants to cast off the docklines and point his boat toward an uncertain and distant horizon, he just laughs, shrugs, and asks, "Why not?"

Further details and contact information available at <http://www.saito8.com>.

Attached photos: Saito checks a 50-foot mast in Maine on his global search for a replacement vessel; Saito with his Blue Water Medal in January, 2007, in New York City; the moment of triumph at the end his 7th solo circumnavigation in 2005; on his induction into the Single-handed Sailing Hall of Fame in 2006.



