



# Taking the Helm: One of America's Top Sailors Tells Her Story

*Dawn Riley, Cynthia Goss*

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By the time the U.S. Women's Challenge had completed the first leg of the 1993-94 Whitbread Round-the-World Race, the crew was riven by dissent, financial problems, and personal conflicts. Only a new captain could save the all-women's team from mutiny and lead them to a successful finish. When Dawn Riley received an unexpected phone call from Uruguay asking her to take on the assignment, she was not eager to step into the midst of a fractured crew—and yet she knew she needed to keep this boat in the race. She packed up her life and flew south. After four days of hasty boat preparation and group training, the women set out from sunny Punta del Este, unprepared for the perils of the treacherous Southern Ocean. In their streamlined, stripped-down vessel, the crew faced near-hurricane winds, numbing temperatures, and jagged icebergs. Eating freeze-dried food and working in four-hour watches, they braved the forces of nature in the face of physical injury, dwindling supplies, equipment failure, and overall exhaustion. In the midst of it all, bitter resentment was brewing among the original crew members while the controversy over Riley's takeover made headlines on land. As the boat sailed on to complete the arduous six-leg race, this female crew and their boat—renamed Heineken for its new sponsor—circumnavigated the globe. But these women traveled much farther than the race's 32,000 miles: with each leg and each new test, this crew learned to rally under their captain's leadership when their very survival was at stake. In recounting how she took responsibility for the lives of eleven other women, Riley tells an extraordinary story of self-discovery within the gripping context of the world's most demanding sailboat race.

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