



## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **'2 BOYS' BECOME YOUNGEST PAIR TO ROW THE ATLANTIC & RAISE OVER £190,000 FOR BREAST CANCER CARE**

**DATE: 27 January 2014**

This evening, Luke Birch (21) and Jamie Sparks (22) have become the youngest pair to row the Atlantic Ocean. They have also become Breast Cancer Care's biggest ever individual fundraisers.

It has taken them 54 days of non-stop rowing and they have battled huge life-threatening waves, 30 knot winds, constant soakings and no more than 80 minutes sleep at a stretch. They have lost over 12kg each in spite of eating 6000 calories a day and they bear excruciating salt-sores. They have rowed 3000 nautical miles. They are the youngest pair to row the Atlantic, coming overall fifth in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge and second in the pairs.

Luke and Jamie – the '2 Boys in a Boat' – have been raising money for Breast Cancer Care. So far, they have raised just over £190,000 smashing their original target of £100,000.

Samia al Qadhi, Chief Executive at Breast Cancer Care, is thrilled that Luke and Jamie have safely arrived at the finish: "Not only are Jamie and Luke world record breakers who have left us humbled and inspired, they are our biggest ever individual fundraisers. They have truly gone above and beyond. Their dedication and commitment has been incredible. We're sure their achievements will motivate many others to support us – whether people fundraise on a large or small scale, every penny makes a huge difference to the charity. Breast Cancer Care is the only UK-wide specialist support charity and this money will ensure the charity continues to provide a vital emotional support network to help thousands of people find a way to live with, through and beyond breast cancer. We cannot thank Jamie and Luke enough."

Childhood friends Luke Birch from Lincolnshire (Doddington; also an Edinburgh student) and Jamie Sparks from London (Islington; also a Bristol student) raised funds for Breast Cancer Care as breast cancer has affected Luke's family. "Seeing your son attempt such a huge challenge has been full of highs and lows but to know that he is doing it for Breast Cancer Care is extraordinary, as breast cancer has affected me and our family," explains Claire Birch who watched Luke finish alongside husband James. "To know that your son is in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean is very difficult for a parent. We are delighted to get our son back on dry land and tell him how very proud of him we all are. Both Luke and Jamie have done incredibly well, and I am in awe of them both."

Jamie's parents are equally happy that their son's challenge is over and recognise the enormity of their achievement.

***Contd.../***

**27 January 2014 press release contd.**

Caroline Barkham commented: "It has been a very difficult time for us at home as we have watched their progress. Their initiation into brutal Atlantic storms and gale force winds in their first few days was horrific to watch, and the occasional satellite call hearing the strain in Jamie's voice was unbearable. When we saw several other teams having to be airlifted to safety due to the conditions, it was really hard as I was just waiting for the call to say that they were next. As Jamie's mother I have felt the burden in the pit of my stomach! I have to thank so many people who have taken an enormous interest in their adventure plus the support team and in particular to the safety officers Ian Couch and Lee Fudge who have been absolutely brilliant in looking after the boys. "

Rod Sparks echoes his wife's sentiments: "The boys have done a fantastic job. For two young men it is an incredible achievement – they've looked after themselves, each other, and the boat in one of the toughest events in a very tough year. Last August I asked Race Safety Officer Ian Couch (he has rowed the Atlantic twice and the Indian Ocean once) what he thought the ideal age was to do this race and he replied 'thirty-seven' – so that gives you some sort of perspective on Jamie and Luke's achievement. I am very proud of them both. They have worked incredibly hard and shown great courage and determination. There have been low points and lots of worrying, but I have really enjoyed being a watching parent and following the progress of all the boats. I think it has been toughest on the two mothers – Caroline and Claire – but they've done brilliantly. They both have businesses and families to run, none of that stops just because Jamie and Luke are rowing an ocean! My daughters Kitty and Rosie have also dealt with it really well. "

For more information or to donate please visit [www.2boysinaboat.com](http://www.2boysinaboat.com).

### **ENDS**

**Notes to editors:** Please contact Amy Claridge MCIPR on 01522 698 698 / 07770 764446.

IMAGES AVAILABLE.

**More information:** Luke and Jamie have been training since summer 2012. Luke is currently studying at Edinburgh University and is no stranger to pushing himself to the limit: in 2010 he swam the English Channel in 14 hours and 45 minutes as a solo swimmer (at the time only 50 people aged 18 and under had completed the swim). Jamie is studying at Bristol University and is from Islington, London. He played rugby for Middlesex (U18s and U20s) and cycled 1500 miles from Gibraltar to London.

The Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge is described as the 'world's toughest endurance race'. Teams – including Luke and Jamie rowing as '2 Boys in a Boat' – row nearly 3,000 nautical miles non-stop in two hour shifts across the world's second largest ocean, the Atlantic. Rowers started on 4<sup>th</sup> December Canary Islands (La Gomera) and finish in Antigua; it is estimated that the 2 Boys in a Boat will arrive at the end of January.

***Contd.../***

**27 January 2014 press release contd.**

As part of their preparations, Luke and Jamie – apart from rowing thousands of practice miles on their boat and rowing machines - had to gain an RYA Yachtmaster Ocean Theory certificate, a First Aid certificate and an RYA Basic Sea Survival course completion certificate. During the race, they are not be allowed any outside assistance and Luke and Jamie will have to survive with onboard supplies, making up their dehydrated food with water produced by a solar powered desalinator.

All the costs of the row have been covered through commercial sponsorship, with lead sponsors Duracell and WeSEE.com along with Reed.co.uk, Sidley Austin LLP and Buzzacott and many more sponsors. The boat was purchased using their savings and some help from their families, and the the plan is to sell her afterwards to offset some of the cost.

[www.2boysinaboat.com](http://www.2boysinaboat.com)

@2boysinaboat

[www.facebook.com/2boysinaboat](http://www.facebook.com/2boysinaboat)

[www.taliskerwhiskyatlanticchallenge.com/](http://www.taliskerwhiskyatlanticchallenge.com/)

**Breast Cancer Care:** Breast Cancer Care is the only specialist breast cancer support charity working throughout the UK. We were founded in 1973 by Betty Westgate, who was herself diagnosed with breast cancer. In the ensuing forty years we have supported millions of women and their families through our face-to-face, phone and online services. We also provide training, support and networking opportunities to specialist breast cancer nurses, and Breast Cancer Care publications are used by the majority of breast cancer units throughout the UK. We campaign for better support and care and promote the importance of early detection, involving people with breast cancer in all that we do. Visit [www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk) or call our free helpline on 0808 800 6000.