



Standing ovation

Chris Bertish's solo paddle across the Atlantic raises the profiles of a number of charities

The ocean has always been an integral part of Chris Bertish's life. He still has memories of being four or five and sailing with his father on their home-made catamaran.

"I started all the ocean-based water sports I know between the ages of three and seven," says the 42-year-old big wave surfer and ocean adventurer. "I was always trying to keep up with my older brothers, which was never easy, but it made me super tough, determined and driven."

Bertish grew up in Cape Town and spent a great deal of time at Langebaan on the West Coast, learning about the water, wind, tides and ocean, sailing on anything that would float and developing an affinity, respect and understanding for the ocean.

After completing a marketing diploma, he took yachts across the Atlantic Ocean and sailed professionally for three years. He then came back to South Africa and worked for Billabong, Gul International and O'Neill. Seven years ago, he started his own businesses, CMB Agencies, which looks after various sports brands, and Chris Bertish-Impossible, his motivational-speaking business.

"It's a constant juggle," he says. "I don't get to spend as much time surfing, or in the ocean, or with my wife, friends

and family as I would like. But it's a choice. Sometimes it's tough and you have to sacrifice, but I believe in what I do, and in helping others in realising their full potential."

Bertish wants to use his life story as inspiration and motivation for other people to go after their goals and dreams.

Adventure and achievement

Bertish recently paddled across the Atlantic Ocean, alone, on a custom-built stand-up paddleboard (SUP) beginning on 6 December 2016 in Morocco and finishing on 9 March 2017, in support of charities Signature of Hope Trust (building schools in the poorest parts of SA), The Lunchbox Fund (monthly income to feed and educate underprivileged kids) and Operation Smile (funding for cleft lip and palate operations for children unable to afford the costs).

"I had been working on this project for two years," he says. "To solo stand-up paddle 8,000km of open ocean between Africa and America for charity was an epic adventure; a test of courage, determination and endurance – against myself and the elements.

"From the moment I set foot on the dock at English Harbour, Antigua, I felt an immense weight lifted from my shoulders. Thinking about all of the kids who would benefit from the SUP Crossing becomes your 'why' when you are out there on the Atlantic for 93 days. That 'why' was so powerful I would call on it to get me through and overcome any obstacle or challenge that came my way. I believe that if you're driven by passion and powered by a purpose greater than yourself, you can get through any obstacles and challenges and achieve the seemingly impossible!"

It took Chris Bertish 1,944,000 paddle strokes to cross the Atlantic on his stand-up paddleboard



Text | Eugene Yiga and supplied Photography | Supplied