

PRESS RELEASE – 29TH October 2019

BRITISH COUPLE BID TO SET BALLOONING WORLD FIRSTS FOR BLIND VETERANS UK

Together, Deborah Day and Mike Scholes will fly across the Atlantic in a balloon. Deborah aims to become the first woman pilot in command and Mike, the first registered blind crew member to make a Transatlantic balloon crossing.

www.transatlanticballoonchallenge.com



Mike Scholes and Deborah Day

Sussex locals Mike and Deborah will bid to make ballooning history as they set out on their record-breaking flight across the Atlantic in July 2020.

This flight was originally scheduled for July 2019, but a world shortage of helium forced Mike and Deborah to postpone the attempt for a year. This shortage has caused the price of helium to triple over the last year.

The couple are searching for a title sponsor who can help them to complete the flight and raise money on behalf of Blind Veterans UK. This is a charity close to their heart since Mike suddenly lost his sight 12 years ago to Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy – a rare condition affecting mostly young men in the UK.

The 3,000+ mile flight from Sussex, New Brunswick in Canada to mainland Europe is expected to take between 5 and 10 days during which the duo's 88ft Rozière balloon will be lifted by a combination of helium and hot air to altitudes of up to 15,000ft.

The balloon Mike and Deborah will be using for the challenge has been specially built for them by Cameron Balloons in Bristol.

The couple will transit the Atlantic in a cramped, 1.8m x 1.4m super-light, British-made wicker basket suspended below the balloon envelope.

Mike learnt to fly with the RAF Volunteer Reserve while at Newcastle upon Tyne university. Later he joined the Royal Navy and continued flying moving on to helicopters.

After leaving the Royal Navy, he started his own passenger ballooning company in Sussex. Before his sight loss in 2007, Mike had gained five British ballooning duration records and was one of only seven British pilots to have flown above 31,000 feet.

"I gave up running the balloon company because passengers felt more comfortable with a pilot who could see" jokes Mike.

He took up long distance running with a local club, where he met Deborah, a medal winning triathlete, and went on to set himself increasingly demanding physical challenges, including a trek to the North Pole.

Deborah owns a successful hairdressing business in Cuckfield, Sussex.

Having begun competing with horses at a young age, she went on to work with point to pointers and racehorses. She then became an endurance athlete, competing in triathlons and has run in over 30 marathons.

After meeting Mike, Deborah learnt to fly balloons. Since then she has won the Great British Long Jump balloon competition (twice) and is the first person to have flown East-to-West offshore along the south coast from Eastbourne to Devon, flown up to 20,000 feet and is the only British female to hold a Rozière balloon licence.

Deborah adds: "I couldn't make the Atlantic trip without Mike. Although he cannot handle the balloon, he is still a very experienced balloonist. When we fly, we work as one. He's a real adventurer - we have that in common."

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Mike and Deborah are seeking sponsorship for the flight in aid of Blind Veteran's UK (www.blindveterans.org.uk).

About Blind Veteran's UK

Set up in 1915 to support ex-servicemen, it continues to provide free support and services to vision-impaired ex-Armed Forces and National Service personnel. It helped former military pilot Mike come to terms with his sight loss.

For further information, interviews or images please contact Kevin Stass on transatlanticballoon@gmail.com

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