

A Lone Swimmer, an Outrigger, and Pink Dolphins: Local Swimmer Breaks Hong Kong-Macau Crossing Record

By Shu Pu, key organiser and paddler, The Clean Cross

Photos courtesy of Anthony Kwan/The Power of Sport Images/Ocean Recovery Alliance



Today's world prioritises speed. Turbo-jet ferries are the preferred travel choice between Hong Kong and Macau, and until a bridge is built, only helicopters can make the 35km Pearl River Delta crossing faster.

Would you consider swimming or paddling to Macau for hours and hours?

Simon Holliday, one of the very few who might try the legendary solo swim, completed the once-in-a-lifetime crossing on 24 May, with me paddling right next to him to become the first sole female paddler to cross the Pearl River Delta from Hong Kong to Macau.

Unexpected pink dolphins

Other escorts were a 12-member support team on a sailing catamaran and – for over an hour – more than 30 pink dolphins (Chinese white dolphins) that seemed to be saying thank you for helping protect our waters.

Simon's swim set a record: 10hrs, 20mins and 30secs. It was like being in a dream, pushing our limits, completely blending in and connecting with the ocean, all to protect the ocean by raising funds for Ocean Recovery Alliance (www.oceanrecov.org).

The swim raised over HK\$230,000 for ORA's Grate Art project (<http://bit.ly/GrateArt>) that has eight Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese artists create artwork on plaques on drains all over Hong Kong. Grate Art's aim is to remind people not to dump waste or litter into drains and thus to decrease dangerous run-off and toxins in the local sea. Special thanks go to the team behind Clean Cross as well as supporters Cotai Water Jet, Lifeproof, Escapade Sports and Fogo Samba.

Simon's frame-by-frame account below of the history-making crossing perfectly describes the effort and mood:

Trying to keep down two bowls of porridge (with Shu's strange sugar) that Michael had kindly made (the first of many meals he would help prepare that day).
Lashings of factor 50+ suncream applied over my body by two beautiful girls.
Standing on the 'chosen' rock. Jumping. Narrowly avoiding a large jellyfish – the only one I saw all day.
Swimming a bit.
Seeing a bloody big container ship.
Swimming a bit.
Sick, tired and thoroughly miserable (all self-induced) at the 30 min, 1-hr, 2-hr and 3-hr marks.
Disorientation as the ferries made waves, while enduring Shu quietly guided me around tankers in concert with navigator Arni who kept us on a perfect course.
Screaming "shark!" only for a grinning Sam to emerge in a wetsuit with an underwater camera.
Ollie, Damo and Anthony dexterously steering cameras on deck and Jeffrey, in his flying machine. Image-capturing devices became sources of comfort knowing of the people behind them.
Following the blue tip of Shu's outrigger canoe.
Hearing word of dolphins swimming alongside despite never seeing them.
The sun shining, the sea calm and clean. What a beautiful world. You'll only get one shot at this and someone's being kind, so keep swimming.



❖ Retching after too much chocolate, banana, jellybean and ibuprofen washed down with precisely 400ml of perfect-strength purple stuff.
 ❖ Enjoying the company of Kirk and then Doug Woodring in the water once they developed the knack of swimming incredibly slowly.
 ❖ Seeing Maggie at every feed, and her wisdom and presence of mind to say "take your time," giving calm and allowing me take on more energy.
 ❖ Swimming a bit.
 ❖ At the 8-hr mark, hearing Andrew say "a record looks promising," and seeing Arni emerge an hour later to utter: "It's on."
 ❖ Seeing the hills of Macau for the first time.
 ❖ The thrill of the tide turning and swimming with Kirk and Doug stroke for stroke. For about 20 seconds.
 ❖ Wondering why I'm not getting any closer.
 ❖ Landmarks eventually getting bigger.
 ❖ Fighting in the silt with the lights going out every time I put my head down. Knowing I was nearly there. Unaware I was being dragged closer and closer to the airport.
 ❖ Crying in my goggles.
 ❖ Pulling myself up the barnacled rock.
 ❖ Hugging Doug at the finishing rock as I climbed up in exhaustion. Doug finding me a rock and a shell to take home. A baffled local fisherman giving me the thumbs up, the internationally known sign for well done.
 ❖ Swimming to the dark sands of Hac Sa beach with Andrew and Kirk behind.
 ❖ Cruz handing me a rich, purple towel.

❖ Speaking to a curiously wary local media.
 ❖ Relieved that I hadn't let anyone down.

Towards the last hour of my paddle, knowing Simon was certain to reach shore and smash the record, and seeing the orange cliff moving closer to us near the airport, I started to wonder how one returns to reality after such an episode. The answer became clear the following day, sailing the catamaran back to Hong Kong in perfect wind and sunshine, with a bit of paddling to loosen up.

Simon describes his swimming style as more tortoise than hare. I'm now convinced this analogy applies to other aspects of our lives: to move towards a goal, slowly, with a friend, and with many, many unexpected pink dolphins is simply beautiful. ✨

Simon Holliday, 35, is a British management and leadership trainer at the Hong Kong office of an international law firm. His Hong Kong-Macau swim time of 10hrs, 20mins, 30 secs beat Beijing swimmer Zhang Jian's 2005 record (10hrs, 43mins).

Shu Pu, 34, the founder of AVRA, an ocean-lifestyle brand and the key organizer of the Clean Cross, became the first female solo paddler to cross to Macau from Hong Kong.

- For a beautiful four-minute edited aerial video of the crossing showing many local pink dolphins alongside Simon and Shu, see <http://bit.ly/CleanCrossSwimAerial1>
- To support clean oceans and the Grate Art project you may contribute via www.justgiving.com/Simon-Holliday