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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

3 July 1986

Dear Mr. Branson,

It was marvellous to have the chance to ride on the Virgin Challenger today and I am most grateful to you and your crew for making it possible. What an exhilarating experience it was - one I shall never ever forget.

Your triumph in the Atlantic Challenge has thrilled the whole country, and I am glad to have been able to see the boat for myself and to have had a real taste of the excitement of your journey.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

—

Richard Branson, Esq.

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PRIME MINISTER

VIRGIN CHALLENGER

You are visiting the Virgin Challenger tomorrow. You will be going by car to HMS Belfast, where the Challenger is moored, immediately after your meeting at the House with Mrs. Sultoon. You will be arriving at the boat at about 1700 hours.

There are expected to be a number of disabled children on HMS Belfast, from a group called Action Research for the Crippled Child. Mr. Branson has brought a scroll back from their counterparts in the US, and he will be presenting this to them when you walk across the Belfast to the Challenger. He hoped you wouldn't mind. We said of course not.

Mr. Branson wrote to you (attached) thanking you for your letter which arrived yesterday evening, and asking if you would also like to go for a spin in the boat. We thought you would be delighted to do so and have therefore arranged for the Challenger to take you from HMS Belfast to Waterloo Pier, which is used by the River Police. Your car will be there to take you back to No.10, where you are due to see Mrs. Phee Miller at 1745.

I attach a press notice issued by Virgin which summarises the background to this second attempt on the Trans Atlantic Record.

Mark Addison

(MARK ADDISON)

2 July 1986



# Virgin Group Limited

95-99 Ladbroke Grove, London W11 1PG  
Tel: 01-229 1282 Telex: 8954617  
Reg. No. in England 1568894

286 1213

2nd July, 1986

The Right Hon. Margaret Thatcher,  
10 Downing Street,  
LONDON

Dear Prime Minister,

Your letter meant a great deal to me. I had just returned from the most wonderful reception on the Scillies to find it on my return.

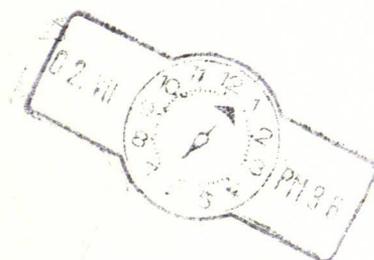
Thank you also for finding the time to come and see us tomorrow. The crew will be enormously appreciative.

If you would like to, we'd like to take you for a five minute ride when you come aboard.

Best Regards,

Richard Branson,  
Chairman

Acton Research for Crippled Children.





WITH COMPLIMENTS

pp. Tony Jaschni



★ VIRGIN BOSS BRANSON TO MAKE SECOND BID FOR ATLANTIC RECORD  
IN BRAND NEW BOAT – VIRGIN ATLANTIC CHALLENGER II

In February music and airline entrepreneur Richard Branson revealed his adventurous 1986 Atlantic Challenge plans - a brand new boat and a seasoned crew in order to have another crack at bringing the prestigious Blue Riband accolade for the fastest Trans Atlantic sea crossing back to Britain this summer.

Moments after the Virgin Atlantic Challenger dramatically sank just 138 nautical miles short of snatching back the honour for Britain last August, Branson vowed to make another attempt for the title. These plans have now reached fruition.

From the rotting hulk of the first Virgin Atlantic Challenger now lying in the 300 fathoms of dark Atlantic water, emerged the vision of the new vessel. She is sleeker and faster than before, but with added rigidity in the form of a strong aluminium monohull as opposed to the twin hulls of the previous boat. And this time the new Virgin Atlantic Challenger II will have a revolutionary lifesaving system to keep the craft afloat - just in case she hits trouble.

Not that the famous crew of six will be thinking of anything but success for, in re-kindling the spirit of famous record-breaking days gone by and the first Atlantic Challenge, five of the previous crew have been picked to go again. All are committed to making the fastest North Atlantic sea crossing and winning back the coveted Blue Riband.

World famous sea adventurer Chay Blyth will again be at the forefront, along with seasoned Atlantic navigator and journalist Dag Pike. Steve Ridgway, who was a key figure in last year's design team, has again volunteered for more punishment as a crewman whilst the only new recruit, Engineer Eckhard Rastig, will tend to any on-board technical problems during the crossing. Also taking part again will be BBC Tomorrow's World presenter and cameraman Peter Macann. The BBC will be broadcasting a 50 minute documentary on BBC 1 shortly after the attempt.

Brooke Yachts in Lowestoft worked flat out, 24 hours a day in shifts, in order to ready Virgin Atlantic Challenger II for early summer. The reason for the change of boat builder from last year was explained by Richard Branson; 'We had to use a new yard because Cougar were too busy building yachts for the Americas' Cup and - with such a short build time - couldn't accomodate us.'

The intrepid team will be looking to make the crossing in late June, early July. They will follow the same route as last year and that of the present Blue Riband record holder, the liner S.S. United States who, in 1952, crossed from the Ambrose Light, New York to the Bishop Rock Lighthouse, Scilly Isles in 3 days 10 hours and 40 minutes.

In order to have a chance of breaking the record, the £1.5 million Virgin Atlantic Challenger II, will have to average forty five knots during the hazardous Atlantic crossing and yet just one piece of floating debris in the wrong place could spell instant disaster. However 35-year-old Richard Branson, the founder and head of the £300 million Virgin empire, is determined to succeed.

Mr Branson did it in 3 days 8 hours and 31 mins  
- 2 hours 9 mins off the record.

.../2

'I made the rash statement that we would definitely try again for the record on TV the night of the sinking.... unfortunately it's been impossible to impound the footage! But, seriously, we were so close last time that we really had to have another crack at the title and we are reasonably confident of success. We have learned a lot from last year's attempt but, by using the same experienced crew and translating those lessons into the design of Virgin Atlantic Challenger II, we are minimising the risks and enhancing our chances of claiming the Blue Riband' said Branson.

The boat has been designed jointly by Sonny Levi and Peter Birkett, both of whom were involved with last year's project. It will be powered by two German MTU turbocharged diesel engines, which proved so effective and reliable last year. In fact, as Richard Branson said; 'We could still hear them gurgling even as the boat disappeared beneath the waves!'

By taking the familiar Great Circle route of 2,949 nautical miles, the Virgin Challenger team hope to reduce the likelihood of meeting any icebergs on this northerly arc, but at the same time run the greater risk of encountering heavier fog banks in the anticipated calmer seas.

That is where supporting companies like RACAL and SAIT have helped by providing invaluable navigation and direction finding equipment.

There will again be three precarious and vital refuelling points, all in the mid Atlantic. These will be organised and co-ordinated by fuel suppliers, Esso Petroleum. The Virgin Atlantic Challenger II crew are also hoping to be able to rely on the RAF's Nimrod aircraft patrols to keep a watchful eye over them during their routine reconnaissance flights in the Atlantic, and advise the crew on alternative routing in critical areas where ice and debris may appear.

It is 34 years since the record was last broken, but the adventurous and now-wiser crew of the Virgin Atlantic Challenger II will be determined to bring the Blue Riband back to Britain - 148 years after it was first won by the paddle steamer Great Western in 1838. But, as adventurer Chay Blyth added, 'We are going to go for it. With all the experience we gained on the last attempt, whilst we can not overcome the obvious dangers, the odds should be with us.'

- Ends -

**For more information please contact**

June 1986

Tony Jardine, Press & PR at  
VIRGIN ATLANTIC CHALLENGE  
95-99 Ladbroke Grove  
London W11 1PG  
Tel: 01-229 1282

Mr Addison  
all done

CR  
Re forward pt.

CR, cc Press Office  
Detectives

Mrs. Ryder

**VIRGIN CHALLENGER II: THURSDAY 3 JULY**

I had a word with the Prime Minister about the diary for Thursday afternoon, after Mike Horne had been in touch with the Challenger team.

The current proposal is that the Prime Minister should go on from the meeting with Mrs. Sultoon at the House directly to the Virgin Challenger II which will be moored next to HMS Belfast. It will probably take about 20 minutes to get there. The Prime Minister might stay at most for half an hour, and return to No.10 expecting to arrive no later than 1800. She would then see Mrs. Miller. The Prime Minister has suggested that Mrs. Miller might be invited for 1730, and see Joy first, until she returns.

Would you do the necessary with the diary with Mrs. Miller and with Joy please? Mike Horne will be confirming these arrangements when he has spoken again to Mr. Powell.

MEGA

Mark Addison

30 June 1986

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10 DOWNING STREET

Richard Branson.

80 Oxford Gardens

W.11

Mr M Landis.

File

Price Michael <sup>net.</sup> 12.00

ster market Belfast.

5.15



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

Monday 30 June '88

Dear Mr. Branson

Congratulations on your terrific success, which is a triumph for you and your team, and a great boost for British initiative.

Well done!

We were waiting  
anxiously all day Sunday for  
the news - it was such a tonic  
when we heard that you had  
done it.

Richard Branson, Esq.

Yours sincerely  
Margaret Thatcher

JA