

Deacon Duo Reclaim Round Britain Record

Featuring: a Hot Lemon, High Speed Sandwiches and a Ghost Ship!

BIBOA Member Dave Deacon tells the story of Hot Lemon V and the Round Britain Record (under 30')

On 11th-12th August 2005, Mike & Dave Deacon set a new time for the under 30' Round Britain Record of 31 hours 22 minutes 46 seconds (subject to official confirmation) in Hot Lemon V, a 10m Scorpion Sports Cruiser with twin standard spec Yanmar 320hp diesel engines. Hot Lemon V has a twin-stepped hull, a deflector instead of a windscreen and an aerofoil section support for the radar, nav lights, twin vhf aerials and radar reflector enhancer. At 3900 RPM the Yanmar engines each used 60 LPH (54kts) but only 45LPH at 3500RPM (48kts); to carry the extra fuel weight, we used 5 blade 28" pitch props. Our usual 30" 5 blade props (pitched down to 29") give 60 kts light. There are twin 100 gall underdeck tanks plus a 190 gallon deck tank.

The Round Britain Records are divided into three parts...(1) Craft under 30ft (2) Craft between 30-50ft (3) Overall fastest for craft of any length. There is a separate Record for Round British Isles (see article within this Riblines) and all these are run to strict UIM rules with safety gear including liferaft, EPIRB and many other items (see the RYA RWS Book Feb 2005). The crew took care to drink plenty of water and to eat long lasting carbohydrate foods with occasional chocolate for comfort!

Dave takes up the story...

Sitting at my P.C. back in London it's hard to believe that only 48 hours ago we were beating ourselves and *Hot Lemon* across the Thames Estuary ... only the constant flare up of back pains every time I move keeps the memory fresh!

The Round Britain records have been a big part of the *Hot Lemon* story from 2001 when Dad, Chris Strickland and Jan Falkowski successfully shattered not only the record for boats under 30 foot in length, but also broke the Overall Fastest record as set by *Drambui Tantalus* in 1992 – a boat using 2600hp against

Hot Lemon III's modest 300hp. In 2002 I was lucky enough to join the team aboard *Hot Lemon IV* in setting a new 30–50 ft Round Britain Record which was successful despite near disaster in very rough tidal conditions in zero visibility off Duncansby Head at 01.00 in the morning.

Records are set to be broken and in 2003 we lost the up to 30ft record to BIBOA Members Neil McGrigor, Tony Jenvey and Simon Rogers and in 2005, Neil, Tony, Jeremy Watts and Neil Guille stepped up to the mark to pitch at both the 30–50 ft record and the Overall Fastest title in *Bradstone Challenger*, a 2000hp 49 ft Ice Marine Blade Runner.

After much *Hot Lemon* testing we sat back to wait for good weather and on 10th August the all important window started to appear and I left London at 6 p.m. that day, only 9 hours before our planned 03.00 start time on 11th August! We then heard that *Bradstone Challenger* would also be starting at 09.30 on the 11th; we wanted to get away early so that we did not arrive at the same fuel stop together but, more importantly, to ensure we were past the dangers of Cape Wrath and Duncansby Head in daylight hours.

After a final weather check and a quick supper we turned in around 21.30 desperate to catch a few hours' sleep after a full day's work. Courtesy of several alarm clocks we arrived at *Hot Lemon* at 02.00 Thursday 11th August. My nerves did not kick in until we left Haven Quay at 02.30 and I found it somewhat demanding running down the Lymington river whilst still partly asleep (*the navigator was on the case! - MD*); my mind was racing: 'I can hardly stay awake at 6 knots, how on earth can we run at 52 knots !?'

Tom Crump was our official timekeeper, in conjunction with Chris and Helen Strickland who were soon in touch to confirm they were in place and ready to time us out...Chris later remarked that it was quite romantic to be strolling along the foreshore in the moonlight with Helen; perhaps we were fortunate to be timed out at all! We now had no choice but to run.

With our stepped hull keeping the stern low in the water, and carrying 350 gallons of fuel, it took a while to plane but thanks to our 5 blade props we were soon cruising along at 38 knots or so, holding back to ensure our starters could see us – the all clear was given and we were off, the clock had been started at 02.59!

Heading out toward the Needles was mentally tough to say the least; I was finding it extremely stressful and it was not until we were out past the Needles that my attitude became one of 'sod it!' and I opened the throttles fully... In the cold air I was impressed to see that the engines were on song big time and we were holding a steady 54 knots with almost a full fuel load.

All was fairly easy going and passed without incident across Lyme Bay. We could tell there was a fair swell running by the way *Hot Lemon* was bucking and flying in the dark, but I amused myself by singing cheesy 80's songs in my head.... Very weird, but it pacified me! By sunrise we were well on our way to Land's End; watching the sun rise over the Lizard behind us was amazingly scenic and as we rounded Land's End we were impressed to see that we had picked up to 55 knots once sheltered from the wind. On the flip side, we were soon being challenged by a 3 foot chop across the Bristol Channel; not a problem in itself, but combined with an underlying ground swell it was causing us to fly in a tiring manner and we dropped back to 50 knots.

Things then deteriorated for 30 minutes or so as we ran into very thick fog, reducing our speed on grounds of safety. We were reporting in to each Coastguard area but were concerned to be told by Swansea: 'Anglesey Coastguard is reporting thick fog', as that was 150NM further up the Irish sea it was not what we wanted to hear.

Fortunately it soon became apparent that the fog was over the coasts on each side of us and as we moved further offshore the sky cleared and the sea calmed to produce a fantastic run and a real confidence boost!

Conditions varied greatly up the Irish sea, from flat calm to an awkward 4-5 foot swell but *Hot Lemon* is a truly fantastic sea boat and we didn't need to back off at all and were able to grab a sandwich as we ran into smoother water halfway up the Irish Sea.

We were some 50 or 60 miles south of Bangor in Northern Ireland when things reached a temporary low – I received text messages from Chris and Jan Falkowski confirming that *Bradstone Challenger* had started at 07:00 rather than 09.30, cutting our lead by 2.5 hours, and on top of this we were again in thick fog and rain...miserable! Regardless, we were happy to make Bangor in an impressive 8 hours 48 minutes, meaning we had averaged 52 knots over 460NM– at this rate we would finish in 27 hours or so!

Bangor Marina was extremely helpful and Susan, the Assistant Berthing Master, was standing on the quayside in the rain, diesel hose in hand, as we pulled alongside; we were out of the harbour and on our way again at 12.22 after taking on 300 gallons - just 34 minutes from entering to leaving the marina!

It was truly fantastic to be heading north and a second sandwich was in order. Scotland has a reputation of being cold and rainy, but we were greeted by hazy sunshine and mirror smooth seas. This was frustrating in a way as we were down to 50/51 knots as the hull stuck to the surface and we knew that

Bradstone Challenger would be flat out at some 70 knots in these conditions, meaning that they would massively reduce our lead!

As Dad took the helm I lay down on the floor in the back of the cockpit, desperate to rest for the night run; unfortunately this was not to be as there was just enough 'popples' on the water to bounce me around on the deck, fracturing numerous ribs, vertebrae and vital organs in the process (possibly an over statement – but it felt like it!), and so back on watch it was!

I took the helm again at 3 pm or so, thinking we would continue our 2 hours on, 2 hours off strategy. In reality it turned out to be a lot longer than that, but *Hot Lemon* is a fantastic boat to drive, so I didn't complain!

Clear skies and calm seas graced us all the way up through the Western Isles and I began to think 'life's not so bad!' On our run up to the halfway point at Cape Wrath, the GPS was showing our predicted finish as 06.45, a total time of 27hrs 46mins ... some 4 hours earlier than planned; spirits were high and even a nasty, sloppy sea slowing us to 49 knots or so wasn't so bad.

We pressed on, wanting to reach Cape Wrath at the tail end of wind over tide, and found the sea had subsided to a following 5/6 foot swell when we arrived - exhilarating but the sensible hat meant caution was in order and I tacked across the swell to avoid a monumental stuff. *Hot Lemon's* stepped hull is superb but as it makes the boat run flat, caution is needed in a following sea.

The following swell across the north of Scotland was pleasant and although the smooth conditions induced tiredness, we were happy to believe there were now only some 13 hours to go, good time for a standard spec privately run family boat...little did we know what lay ahead. To great relief, Duncansby presented little by way of serious challenge, but we did back off the power; tact is better than heroics. I sent a text to Chris and Jan to update them and must thank them, as their replies were full of encouragement, exactly what we needed in fading light and now gathering seas.

Once rounding the corner we reported to the Coastguard and I began to feel a little uneasy as we were now running downwind in a growing swell.... It was at this point I recalled the last weather forecast I had seen (but not told Dad about) which mentioned a possible north/north westerly force 4/5 in places down the east coast; the forecast may yet prove to be accurate! We cracked on to Peterhead and we were both doing frantic calculations. *Bradstone Challenger* was some 170 miles behind and even if they continued to run at 16 knots more than us, it would take them 11 hours to catch us. Although we were running for different Records, it was to be a race to the finish, some 550NM away.

The Peterhead fuel team of Jim and Bruce are always very helpful to the *Hot Lemon* Round Britain runs and willingly turn out in the wee small hours; this time it was Jim's turn and it was an act of exceptional kindness to find him lowering a bag of fish and chips with hot coffee as we pulled alongside the tall quayside ... thank you Jim. For the first time we filled our tanks to the very brim, almost 400 gallons on board.

After 40 minutes we were away and my heart sank as the diesels bogged down at 1800 rpm, some 200 rpm short of turbo assistance ... we were stuffed! Fortunately, *Hot Lemon* doesn't quit easily and after a bit of swinging her around and lifting the outdrive legs, the 5 blade props were free enough to reach turbo and haul 6 tons up to 52 knots ... phew.

As night came on I handed the helm to Dad; I had chosen to be on the helm for 7 hours and was shattered. By the time we were 100 miles south of Peterhead we were some 60NM offshore and all we could see was the outline of each other, a dim GPS and total darkness. Around 12.30 we had a major panic as we spotted what appeared to be a ghostly white shape keeping pace with us about a mile off the starboard bow. Dad woke me from my doze/day dream (at night!?) with a sharp punch and asked for my input. We had no idea what it was so we turned away from our course and ran out to sea thinking it may be a shaft of moonlight or perhaps *Bradstone Challenger* trying to identify us (which it wasn't). After a while the white shape shadowed us out to sea. It had no lights to identify it, other than an overall luminous glow, and when we found ourselves 3 miles off course, still being shadowed, Dad decided to turn and run towards it. As we did this, the 'ghost' turned towards the shore and accelerated away at high speed, disappearing towards the Tyne/Tees area ... any ideas anyone?

We were some 50 miles north of the oilrigs off the East Coast when I took the helm and will confess to then completely losing my bearings and the plot. We had run into a rainstorm and could see some kind of huge fire miles away on our starboard beam; given that we were some 50NM offshore we thought 'that cannot be a refinery ashore' could it?

What made it worse was looking at the apparent fire and thinking 'watch out, we're running ashore, I can see huge rolling hills' ... then it dawned on me: those weren't rolling hills, it was a large swell - a chilling realisation at 50 knots in total darkness, believe me. Regardless of this, we kept the throttles open and as we occasionally took off I was at times able to do a count of '1...2...3...down' - not good for the nerves!

The rain was now coming in at 45 degrees, which, in my shattered state, was leading me to lose my sense of direction and balance; I developed a sensation that the boat was listing heavily to starboard, my counteraction was to

constantly steer to port, desperately trying to level the boat out. This meant we were constantly turning into the large swell and after a while I thought 'the only way out is to hand over the helm'. I can only put it down to utter fatigue and it took me some 2 hours to retrieve the plot.

Around 04.00 the rain stopped and dawn was breaking, time for another high-speed sandwich (difficult to find the mouth in those conditions). After a short rest I had reassembled the plot and I took over, running at some 48 knots – only one monumental leap, which caused the boat to dramatically corkscrew in the air and me to think 'we're going over', slowed me down again!

Sadly, it was about to come to a near 'tears before bedtime' incident. The short mast which carries the radar, two radio aerials and 'Sea me' radar reflector is stylish but the constant hammering over the previous 300 miles had caused metal fatigue and it snapped halfway up its length. Only good fortune and the cables inside prevented it from smacking us in the head; had it done so, I think we would still be in hospital. Skipper balanced on the wet cabin roof to use cable cutters and hacksaw to release the mast and gubbins which we then ratchet strapped to the cockpit floor. We used tape and polythene to seal the open end and set off again after some 25 minutes.

By now we were both pretty tired and battered: my neck hurt so much I could barely hold my head up and every knock caused pain to the point I wondered whether we could go on ... thank you Nurofen! We agreed that we had plenty of time in hand and would continue at reduced speed of 40 knots, hopefully still about one hour inside the Record at which we were aiming. In the event, this was virtually all we could make; crossing the Thames Estuary turned out to be the worst part of all, the wind was now west force 5 or more with heavy 2-3 metre breaking seas on the beam. Skipper was back on the helm and did a superb job of running through the troughs at 40 knots or so.

Water was constantly breaking over us, and looking up at the next breaking crest was less than thrilling. Our spirits were quite low by now but, as Dad said later, the choice was either to press on or to turn and run before it to Belgium!

We eventually rounded North Foreland but were now punching into a 4-5 foot chop; the pain had returned and I relied on the Aussie expression 'show some grit, Pom' - simple, yet effective!

We eventually found some shelter off Dover, stopped, and for the first time in 10 hours made contact with Chris Strickland. I gathered that his welcome was something along the lines of 'Where the **** have you been?!' It transpired that Chris had been up all night worrying about us, with a bottle of red wine for

company and occasional chats with the Coastguard. Each of us received texts ranging from 10.45pm to 4am asking where we were ...thank you Chris!

However, once the telling off was over, the race was back on – Dad manhandled me out of the way with the words, 'Sorry about your neck, but there's a job to be done', and booted poor *Hot Lemon* into the head seas. We had 120NM and 4 hours left to beat the Record. If this had been a normal race, and us in good health, it would have been a superb run, but the pain was now causing me to squeak every time we landed – only the engine noise and head wind avoided Dad hearing (*selective deafness actually — MD*).

As we approached the Forts off Portsmouth we spotted the rooster tail of *Bradstone Challenger* a few miles ahead and, although we had no idea as to when they passed us, we now appeared to be catching her. We trailed them across their finish line off the Royal Yacht Squadron by a minute or so and we recall their wonderful sportsmanship in quickly circling their craft to give us a handclap as we passed them to run for our line off Lymington: that was a massive morale boost after what had turned into a 1400 nautical mile race! We thoroughly commend them for their superb achievement in bringing the Overall Record back to a British entrant and have no doubt they could cut the Record to 24 hours in the right conditions.

We were timed in at 10.22 am on 12th August by Tom Crump ashore and Chris afloat in *Seahound V* and it was a moment to remember, being greeted with champagne at *Hot Lemon's* base in Haven Quay by Graham plus almost all of Team Scorpion and Mark, Matt and Will who have tirelessly lifted *Hot Lemon* in and out of the water (with a fork lift!) whilst we were testing.

We'd done it ... a new Record of 31 hours 22 minutes 46 seconds, at an average speed in excess of 44 knots, despite encountering some of the worst conditions I've been through in some 11 years of RIB Racing.

Job done!

Dave Deacon
Hot Lemon V