

Monte Carlo

Seahound V Breaks London to

In September 2005, I was enjoying a celebratory drink with friend Mike Deacon after the team and I had set the record earlier that year for fastest time Round the British Isles in 72 hours and 27 minutes in *Seahound V*, a Scorpion 10 metre cabin RIB fitted with 2 x 315hp Yanmar Diesels, 36 hours faster than the previous record. I suggested looking at the RYA homologated book to see what other records could be challenged, as Mike also has a taste for breaking records himself. I was part of his team when we set the Round Britain records in August 2001 for under 30 ft and 2002 for 30–50ft in *Hot Lemon III* and *Hot Lemon IV*. I was intrigued to see that the London to Monte Carlo record had no records set to date in the under 30ft or 30-50ft classes. Realising that this challenge was only 400miles more than the Round the British Isles, I decided to give it my best attempt.

An idea was for Mike and I to run together, then once we got to Ibiza, the gloves would be off and we would race for the fastest record overall, although both of us could set a record within our own right in our individual class. *Hot Lemon* in under 30ft and *Seahound* in 30-50ft. Mike was committed for 2006, so the question remained, should I go alone? Rescue outside the British waters can cost up to £20,000, which is not something I wanted to budget for and running through the three weather regions of The Channel, The Bay of Biscay and The Mediterranean would also be a challenge. I decided to call a strategic team meeting with fellow team mates Gordon Compton, John Puddifoot and Jan Falkowski to form a decision. It was crunch time and we decided to make an assault in June/ July, before the trade winds set in across Biscay, which would make it impossible for record breaking in the big following seas.

The two 320hp Yanmar inboard diesel engines were Replaced, as the originals had clocked up over 800 hours



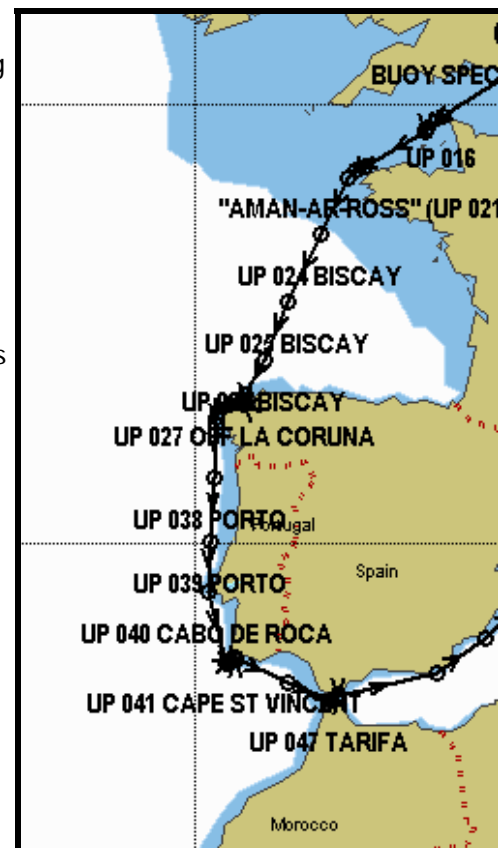
Seahound V refuelling at St Peter Port, Guernsey

in a combination of long distance cruising and racing, and the Merc Bravo Ones were overhauled, and then it was a question of waiting. John was to study the weather and would give a five-day warning for when things looked good. On

Sunday 16th July 2006, John gave the green light for a Thursday go from London and Gordon and I fitted an extra 500 litre fuel deck tank, for *Seahound V* has a 1000 litre inboard tank on board and this would enable us to get the range for refuelling 3 times en route to Monte Carlo. Armed with my seventy-point checklist, we made

some other minor modifications, which included stripping out the boat, not forgetting to leave installed the necessary 'emergency toilet!' Good friend Tony Thomas, Gordon and I towed the boat to London to be launched and Tony would return to Lymington the following day with the trailer. Two punctures later on the M25 we were not off to a good start, particularly after we learned the M25 was closed on the QE2 Bridge. The only option was to hold our breath through Blackwall tunnel and we squeezed through by a lucky couple of inches. This delay proved to be a problem, as we wouldn't make it to our very necessary fuel that was waiting in Bow. After a pleading phone call to request a late opening, with the promise it would be worth his while, we left with a loaded fuel tank and a dent in my pocket! Even so, Gordon was amazed at how easy it was to buy red diesel in the middle of London, simply by driving in near the Bow Flyover!!! I hasten to add all was legal as we only filled the boat.

We launched the boat at Poplar Dock and British Waterways escorted us round to West India Dock where I met up with old friend Sue King who works for British Waterways and had



Cape St Vincent, Europe

organised slipping, berthing and locking out for *Seahound*, ready for our 07.00 lock out the following morning. When attempting a record, one would think a comfortable night's sleep is at the top of the list, so instead of checking in to our hotel we met up with Sir Charles Blois for an early dinner in The Gun. After our last meal on land until what we hoped would be a victorious one in Monte Carlo, our early night turned into a bit of a late one and Gordon, Tony and I were invited to spend the night on the Scouts' training ship in the dock. It seemed like a good idea at the time but on such a humid summer's evening the air conditioning in the ship made so much noise, I ended up having about one hour's sleep. At 05.00 I saw the flag flapping around worryingly outside so I stuck my head out of the porthole to sniff the strong wind and immediately thought what have I let all of us in for?

The show must go on, as they say, and John and Jan arrived to complete the team for the 7am lock out. We cruised down the Thames to our start line off Gravesend where Ann Robinson was waiting in the harbour office to give our start time. At 7.09 am on Thursday 20th July 2006, we were off at 45 knots, carrying 700 litres of fuel to enable us to run fast to St Peter Port, in Guernsey, The Channel Islands, where we would fuel to our 1500 litre maximum capacity. It was blowing a force 4/5 from the west as we concentrated hard to keep off the shallows along the Yantlet flats. It would not have been the time to run aground! It was noticeable that the wind farm turbines in the Thames Estuary were turning quite quickly as we passed by.

The Channel crossing didn't bode too well and as we rounded the North Foreland we set a course for the Cherbourg Peninsula and we headed into the sea. Luckily the wind was with tide and after rounding Cap de la Hague it flattened off and John took *Seahound V* into St Peter Port at 13.30. Our team logistics manager, Mel Wilby, had made prior arrangements for us to have priority service so after a twenty-minute turnaround we departed with 1500 litres of fuel for a night crossing of Biscay.

We stopped off of Brest in a flat sea to don our dry suits for the notorious hostile night crossing of Biscay, whilst Gordon issued the, 'man overboard' alarms, courtesy of Raymarine. As night fell we began to see big purse seine fishing fleets with strange circular lights flashing and large circular nets around the boats. A large concern was that we were going to run into the nets so we hop scotched through the darkness into the swell. Half way across Biscay we had the ocean to ourselves and didn't see anything until the approach to La Coruna. Having had a very heavy landing during the night in the big swell that was running our starboard beam, the three hour advantage we had made had now been lost, but we thought the worst was over.

Our next fuel stop was in Sada at 4am, which was five miles from La Coruna where another member of the team, Alison Criado Perez, had organised out of hours refuelling.

After difficulty finding the place, we approached the pontoon and at the back of my mind I wondered whether Sr Santiago Ferrerio would be there or not as, had he not have been, the attempt would have been scuttled. My worries melted away after a successful 30 minute refuelling and, after a quick toilet rush by the team, we were heading for Lagos, our next port of call in the Portuguese Algarve

We had an effective cycle in which we crewed the boat, with each member rotating in two hour slots between taking the helm, navigating, sleeping on the 'bed', (an extremely thin mattress, situated alongside the engine box, which soon became pillow-less after a strong gust of wind, and a place where one could experience a noisy full body slam in the rough seas!) followed by recovery in the back bolster seat where, if you happened to drop off, you could easily break your teeth on the one in front.

As we approached Lisbon the salt was in my face as we found ourselves in a force 4/5 north westerly on the beam. As soon as we got to Cape St Vincent, the most westerly point of Europe, we started to run east and made it to Lagos, Portugal, on Friday at 16.30. My sister-in-law, Vanessa, and her husband, Andy Eardley, who live in Lagos, greeted us on the pontoon with friends and a welcoming cold beer. We thought we now had a pleasant run to Gibraltar, and Mel had arranged for our contact, Wayne Warwick, to obtain permission from the government of Gibraltar for us to enter their waters, as they have banned entry of all rigid inflatable boats. They agreed to let the Spanish know there would be a RIB approaching at high speed to be timed off Point Europa around midnight.

Our predictions were wrong and it ended up being a rough leg to Gibraltar but we made it through, with John taking the helm as Wayne timed us in for the World Record from London to Gibraltar at 00.00am Friday night/Saturday morning. Wayne informed us on the radio that there were calm conditions en route for Ibiza which, due to running fairly near to the Spanish coast, unfortunately meant the possibility of fog. Within half an hour we were down to 30 metres visibility, running at 40 knots with the radar, as we always had someone on radar watch switching from 6



The team relaxing in Monaco Yacht Club - it's a hard life!

miles coverage down to 1 quarter mile looking for any targets.

On course for Almeria, I woke up in the damp mist to hear Jan, who was on the helm, and Gordon discussing two targets. One had been following us for half an hour and the other was heading directly for us. As we altered our course, so did they. Eventually the target following us disappeared but the one approaching was now very persistent and within a mile. We decided to stop and confront the mysterious stranger. Running illegal immigrants is big business in the area so by this time we were preparing to see a Spanish gunboat hammering towards us out of the fog. Luckily the unidentified boat disappeared south, a quarter of a mile to our port and we began to relax as day dawned and the fog lifted. We were on our way to the final stop, San Antonio in Ibiza.

We were in constant contact on the satellite phone with Mel, who communicated with John Stone, who had organised refuelling in Ibiza and who would also be waiting with a spare battery to replace the one that we had previously cooked off of Lagos in Portugal. During a routine crew changeover en route to San Antonio, as I passed the helm over to John whilst running off our one battery, the port engine died and the throttles refused to co-operate. This was a real low point as breaking down in the Mediterranean isn't really an option. During the tense 45 minute stop, whilst bobbing up and down we changed the engine filters, which appeared to temporarily solve the problem.

We sped into San Antonio harbour expecting a welcoming party and as we performed our routine queue jump to refuel, as by prior arrangement, I noticed a lot of angry faces glaring at us in the heat and realised our battery was nowhere to be seen. Whilst refuelling, after unsuccessfully reassuring the unsmiling customers that it had all been organised, we phoned Mel to see where our much-needed battery was. He informed us that John was waiting for us in the north harbour and it suddenly dawned on us that we were in the south harbour, hence all the confusion. It was decision time: do we wait for the spare battery, whilst wasting valuable time, which could cost us the record, or can we make it with one battery? By now we had paralleled the good battery with the bad one to get

instrumentation working and the decision was made to take our chances so we left en route to Monte Carlo, our final destination.

The last leg of the journey was beautifully calm, and it needed to be, although psychologically it was the worst part of the journey as we all hoped the battery would hold out. I took the helm for the last 100 miles of our record-breaking attempt and had to deal with a force 5 coming at us off the starboard bow which, being typical Mediterranean Sea, had come suddenly from nowhere. Mel had liaised with the timekeepers who had informed him that they would 'switch on the lights when we approached.' Dubious as to what this actually meant, it all became clear as we saw the flare shoot up and *Seahound V* cleared the finish line. We were timed in at 22.22pm on Saturday 22nd July 2005, making the fastest long distance offshore passage of 2,080 nautical miles from London to Monte Carlo in 61 hours and 11 minutes, averaging just under 40 mph, knocking 2 hours and 3 minutes off the previous record. We also established port-to-port records from London to Gibraltar and Gibraltar to Monte Carlo in the 30ft-50ft categories.

Trevor Lawson and a friend of Sir Charles Blois welcomed us on the pontoon, accompanied by a waiter holding a silver tray of champagne glasses, which were gratefully received. Still shell shocked, the Commodore invited us into the Monaco Yacht Club. This was the first time we had really set foot on land since Thursday at 7.00 am, except for four fast refuelling stops, so we fell into the bar and when I inquired what time the bar closed I was informed that it didn't! Amazingly we found a restaurant open in the early hours of the morning and enjoyed our first proper meal after living off Red Bull and sandwiches for three days. The next day, Phil Pennicott arranged for *Seahound V* to be craned out and stowed in the Antibes yard for collection at a later date.

We were the third boat ever to have attempted this record and we are ecstatic to hold the overall record, particularly since the boat we had beaten was an 80ft monster with 6000hp engines. This route is notoriously challenging and is testing on both the boat and crew. Logistically, we had been planning our route and refuelling stops since September 2005, so lots of work had gone on behind the



The team indulges in a celebratory meal in Monte Carlo



Another Scorpion is craned ashore

scenes. Timing the weather is crucial. We travelled through three weather regions and they all had to be favourable. There is only two months of the year when this is possible and even then you are not guaranteed the perfect sea state. It was great to have taken on a massive challenge and come out on top.

Chris Strickland
Seahound V

The HotRIBS.Com Anglesey RIB World Record Circumnavigation of Anglesey Trophy

HotRIBS will award a trophy to the person who establishes a speed record for circumnavigating the Isle of Anglesey (Sir Ynys Mon) in North Wales in a rigid hull inflatable boat (RIB). The course is overlooked by the mountains of Snowdonia and, although less than 100nm in distance, it is dominated by four fearsome passages on the route around the island. These are Carmel Head; South Stack; Caernarfon Bar and the notorious Swellies in the Menai Straits. Exceptional planning and seamanship is essential to ensure success on this route. Competition for the trophy can only be undertaken during the quieter winter months as the rigorous speed restrictions along the Menai Straits make an attempt in the busy summer months prohibitive.

The trophy will be engraved with the names and times of the record breakers and kept on display at the Royal Anglesey Yacht Club at Beaumaris. Pilot and navigator will receive a commemorative piece of crystal as a permanent memento of their achievement.

Requirements:

1. Open to all comers, start and finish at the discretion of the challenge team;
2. Crew are free to establish their own course and direction (clockwise or anticlockwise);
3. The circumnavigation to be undertaken in a rigid hull inflatable boat as defined by the RIB National Authority BIBOA. (www.biboa.com);
4. Compliance with the requirements of the RYA Red Book (Round Britain and other Long Distance Records) except that HotRIBS will accept official timings by the designated timekeeper as a World Record, subject to ratification as a National Record. This is to keep administration costs to a minimum for any competitors. Contact the RYA for copies of the RYA Red Book.
5. RYA scrutinised vessel and safety kit. Scrutineer nominated by RYA;
6. RYA timekeepers on the day for the record timing, nominated by RYA;
7. Passage plan submitted to RYA along with red book paperwork;
8. Permission must be gained from Ynys Mon (Isle of Anglesey) Maritime Officer and Caernarfon Harbour Master to exceed the speed restrictions in place along the Menai Straits. **IMPORTANT:** Record attempts will only be permitted from October to March;
9. All sailing clubs and training centres along the Menai Straits and Holyhead Coastguard must be advised prior to any challenge date;
10. HotRIBS.Com to be notified of any impending attempt.

Contacts for Any Attempt

Ynys Mon Maritime Officer: Geoff Lowe email: geoff.lowe@anglesey.gov.uk

Caernarfon Harbour Master: Richard Jones email: richard@caernarfon-hbr.demon.co.uk

HotRIBS: Kevin Goulding email: admin@hotribs.com

RYA: John Puddifoot or Shelia Wright Tel: 023 80 604238 email: shelia.wright@rya.org.uk

BIBOA: RIB Definition Rules, General Secretary BIBOA - Helen Strickland Tel 01590 622067 email: general-secretary@biboa.com

Photos and route plan courtesy of Chris Strickland



The World Record Breaking crew: Chris, Jan, John and Gordon