

New Round British Isles Record

A Tale of a Sea Hound and Four Salty Old Sea Dogs
—but this is no shaggy dog story!

BIBOA Member Jan Falkowski tells the story of Sea Hound V and the Round British Isles Record

On 10th-13th July 2005, Chris Strickland, John Puddifoot, Jan Falkowski and Gordon Compton set a new time for the Round British Isles Record of 72 hours 27 minutes (subject to official confirmation) in Sea Hound V, a 10m Scorpion Sports Cruiser.

Jan takes up the story...

In early 2004 Chris Strickland suggested trying to break the record for going around the British Isles. Chris asked myself, John Puddifoot and Gordon Compton to make up the team. To try to break the record was going to be a real challenge as we knew that going around the British Isles is a lot tougher than Round Britain, one for the men rather than the boys. The West Coast of Ireland and the run outside the Outer Hebrides to the Shetlands is very exposed to the Atlantic swell. The Shetlands are further north than Oslo and Reeds Almanac states 'weather conditions are bad in winter; yachts should only visit Apr-Sept'.

Mike Deacon kindly agreed to lend us his extra deck tank from the successful Round Britain Record in 2002. Fuel consumption was still going to be a critical factor so Chris decided to fit a flow scan so we could accurately monitor how much we were using. Finding fuel without making too many detours is not easy in Southern Ireland or the Outer Hebrides. Eventually it was decided to refuel in Dingle in Southern Ireland, Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides and Peterhead in Scotland. We could also take on extra fuel in Lerwick in the Shetlands and Ramsgate if need be.

The boat and crew were ready in next to no time. We all knew that we had to have the best weather possible to attempt to go around the British Isles. Without a decent window in the weather there would be no point in even setting off. Ideally we would go in late June or early July to have the longer daylight hours. We had decided we would leave in the early hours of the morning so we would arrive at the first refuelling stop in the mid afternoon. This would be an advantage when coming in to an unfamiliar port.

June and July passed without any decent weather. It was very frustrating as August and September passed. At the end of September we reluctantly decided to postpone the attempt till 2005. We knew that there was little chance of getting a break in the weather until the spring so we put the project on the back burner for the winter. It was a

surprise when John Aldiss went round the British Isles in January and set a new record of 104 hours. They had been through some very rough weather but still managed to take over 20 hours off the previous record.

From May onwards we began to keep an eye on the weather. The 5 day forecasts gave us an idea of when a window might develop. Although there were a number of spells where the weather looked good on the South Coast and the Irish Sea, Scotland and the Shetlands were invariably rough when the South was favourable. In early June the forecast began to look favourable for a settled period of 4-5 days around the 8th of June. Typical I thought. I was racing in the Power Boat P1 series and the Italian Grand Prix was on the 10th of June in Anzio. Chris's team was all set to go and planning to carry a spare gear box instead of me! The forecast was not as good as had been hoped for though and so 24 hours before they were due to set off, the attempt had to be postponed.

At the beginning of July the weather was again looking promising. At 24 hours before set off the forecasts looked reasonable. The northern stretches were still rough but were improving, and due to be reasonable by the time we got there. The extra fuel tank was fitted again, the tanks were filled and all the equipment was stowed on board. Helen Strickland filed our route with the coastguard, warned the fuel stops that we were due to set off and let our supporters know.

The next morning, Sunday 10th July, we left Lymington at 3.15 a.m. and slowly motored down the river. We were timed as we started from Bournemouth Pier at 4.04 a.m. We were off. The sea was slight as we settled into our routine. We were going to run on two hour watches. We would rotate from navigating to driving, then sleeping and resting. This meant that after sleeping and then resting you could get used to the sea state before you drove. It was almost light when we started and we were soon running along the south coast at 40 knots. We radioed the coast guard as we moved from coast guard area to area. It was a nice surprise when we recognised Richard Salaman's voice at Portland coast guard.

We could feel the swell increase slightly as we passed the Lizard but we were still making very good progress. Fortunately we had a good mobile signal when Helen rang to tell us that there was only 400 litres of diesel at Dingle and they had arranged for us to refuel at Kilrush instead. As we expected to need 1200 litres it could have been a real problem. We adjusted the navigation at the next watch change and were relieved that the detour would only add another 60 miles or so. When we were an hour away we rang the fuel berth who warned the lock keeper we were on the way. We radioed the lock as we approached and were allowed straight in. Kilrush was a beautiful harbour, but we did not have the time to enjoy it on this occasion. While the engines were checked and the boat refuelled John went off to the fish and chip shop. Although we had plenty of food on board, and 60 litres of water, fresh food is always a morale booster. As we radioed on the way out the lock keeper told us we could go straight out as the lock was free flowing. We had set ourselves a target of 70 hours for the trip and we were only an hour or so behind after the first refuelling.

As we headed up the west coast the swell gradually increased but we were still making good progress. At times there was mist but it tended to clear very quickly. We saw the Aran Isles in the distance as we headed out towards St Kilda. There was by now a large following Atlantic swell which had begun to slow us down. On constant throttles our speed varied from 18 to 30 knots depending on whether we were climbing up the front of a wave or surfing down the back. Although it was the sort of sea one would normally be happy to play in, it was very different to be so far offshore with over a thousand miles to go. None of us wanted to stuff the bow and risk damaging the tubes.

The conditions were still reasonable and we continued to make good progress toward Stornoway. By the time we reached the harbour the wind had begun to pick up. It took just over an hour to refuel and then we were off. By now the wind had picked up and was blowing a force 5 right on the nose. The cold spray added to the discomfort and was a bit of a morale dampener. No one was looking forward to several hundred miles like this. Fortunately the conditions gradually improved as we headed further north. We knew that we were nearing the half way point, which though encouraging meant we still had a long way to go. We were all going to feel more relaxed once we had been around the Shetlands. Finally we drew close to Muckle Flugga, the northern most point of the Shetlands, and the farthest north we would go, at 60 degrees 51 north. The Rocks were covered in birds who suddenly took flight as we neared, making it like a scene from Hitchcock's 'The Birds'. The sea was almost flat on the far side and we sped up to 40 knots on the run to Lerwick. We radioed the coast guard and asked them to find out if there were any berths as we had decided to stop there for a few hours.

We all agreed it would be sensible to stop for a few hours' sleep. Although it was the middle of the night we were so far north it was still light. We all slept on the deck of the barge we had tied up to and had 3 hours well earned sleep. We awoke refreshed and raring to go. As we left the Shetlands and headed past the Orkneys we were pleased that the swell had lessened. Although we had spent several hours longer in Lerwick than we had to, the improvement in the weather meant we were able to make up some of the time. There was occasionally fog but it was very patchy. All was going well until 15 miles or so from Peterhead the starboard engine stopped. Instantly we were all wide awake. The Racor fuel filter for the starboard engine was full of water! Once we had drained the filter we had the engine running again in a matter of minutes. There was no water in the port filter but the worry was where had the water in the starboard one come from. We were all acutely aware that even a minor problem could still snatch the record away from us. We were all quiet as we came into Peterhead. After we refuelled we tied up in the marina for a short while and checked the engines again. We decided we would run closer to the coast than we had originally planned on the way down to The Wash.

The run down the east coast was hard work. The sea was confused and made the driving hard. We were using more fuel than usual and decided we would top up in Ramsgate to be on the safe side. We phoned ahead (once we got a signal off Norfolk) to arrange for the fuel berth to stay open. As we crossed the Thames estuary in the dark we found that there was a gap in the coverage on our electronic charts, so out came the old paper charts. We phoned the fuel berth as we came in shortly before 10 p.m. We were on our way again 30 minutes later. We began to relax for the first time and were

hoping to be celebrating in a little over 4 hours. As it was the last stretch was miserable. A short steep chop meant we were having a rough ride. We were making steady progress but realised we would not finish till after 4, so we texted our reception committee to let them know. As we approached St Catherine's the sea was settling and was flat calm for the final run to Bournemouth. We crossed the line shortly at 4.31 a.m. We had done it, around the British Isles in a new world record time of 72 hours and 27 minutes. Not bad for around 1900 miles. Mike Deacon and Annie Wallbank met us at the pier with coffee and champagne. Both were very welcome. After some interviews for the papers and TV we unloaded the boat. After a few hours' sleep we were out in the boat again on the way to Poole. The Royal Motor Yacht Club had organised a reception to celebrate the new record. Chris was asked by the TV interviewer if he would be doing any more record attempts: "Never again," he said. However, a few weeks later he was having second thoughts!

Jan Falkowski