

The Daily Mail British International Harmsworth Trophy ***As seen by Dave Deacon in Hot Lemon***

HEAT 2...Thursday 21st August 2003

This was to be one of the most challenging days I have experienced. Following the very rough and exhausting Heat 1 on the previous Sunday, I spent all of Monday at work struggling to move without a steady stream of pain killers and Deep Heat to relieve the pain in my back. I was praying I would recover in time for Thursday.

My anxiety came from the daily weather checks, which were promising less than flat conditions, and I was in two minds as to whether or not I could withstand another pounding. However, the week progressed and as we left Lyminster at 07.45 Thursday morning, I was feeling in good form, more determined than ever to "push further than the limits"; if only I knew what lay in store.....

Drivers' briefing at the Royal Yacht Squadron (RYS) proved quite amusing as we all tried to psyche each other out, but, true to form, Officer of the Day Rob Andrews soon had us whipped back into line and on hearing a forecast of a westerly wind at force 4, rising to 5, Dad and I decided to take things a little more seriously. As we would be starting at the end of wind over tide conditions we taped down everything and anything that could possibly move, stopping short of taping ourselves in!

Time stood still as we sat in the muster area. We were a little surprised that everyone had (more or less) made it out on time; 'Eraser 2' was the last to arrive due to battery problems, but the boat looked fantastic as they came hammering down toward us, desperate to make the start time.

Soon enough the yellow flag was up and we were rolling. The start run seemed to go on forever as we were led toward the RYS line. We were all nudging ahead then dropping back - unfortunately, I had throttled off just as the green flag was raised and it seemed to take forever for our turbos to spin up again and we were off!

Wettpunkt.com, Premier Crew and Eraser 2 soon pulled ahead of the rest of us as we charged off toward West Lepe. We were encouraged to be pulling ahead of Seahound & Silent Mistress and right on the transom of Buzzi Bullet. As we approached West Lepe mark, Buzzi Bullet had managed to pull out about 70 feet on us and all boats were already driving on the limit, running flat out in a 2 to 3 foot following sea.

The next mark at West Ryde Middle was our chance to catch Buzzi Bullet; as we rounded the mark, the others spotted the large orange mark we had been mustering around and assumed it to be a mark of the chute. I put my trust in Dad when he told me to ignore it (not often do I do what I'm told!) and we were again neck and neck as we set off to start our first lap of the island!

As we ran down the Solent into a head sea there was nothing to choose between us but as we neared Yarmouth the conditions calmed and they were able to pull 100 metres ahead. The three leading boats were by now far away towards the horizon!

As we roared out past Hurst Castle, we knew things were going to be 'interesting' as a vicious three foot chop appeared and gradually built into a solid 5 to 6 foot swell as we neared Bridge buoy at the Needles. We were gradually edging ahead of Buzzi Bullet when our navigational 'whoops' occurred; for some reason Dad thought we were bound for South West Shingles and hammered straight on past Bridge, unfortunately this gave Buzzi Bullet the chance they wanted. As they sliced round behind us and set off toward St Catherine's, we were less than thrilled to realise our error and see they had again pulled out a 100 metre lead on us.

Running toward St Catherine's Point was a fantastic but scary experience as the breaking swell had built considerably at around 7 to 8 feet; there was nothing to separate the two boats as we pushed on hard. In these conditions we were each struggling to keep our boats in the water and to swing around the next big wave, exhausting at 45 knots. I fought with the wheel and the throttles, Dad constantly played with the trim on the legs and the tabs; too much trim and we were drenched as the nose dipped low, although our "anti-stuff" bow prevented a real soaking - I was wet through half way to St Cats and less than happy to say the least!

As we neared St Cats we could see a rooster tail about a mile off our starboard bow and we amused ourselves as to who it could be and why it looked as though they were inbound from Cherbourg.

Rounding the point we hugged the shore as close as we dared to look for shelter, the seas had now lengthened enough for us to trim up a little and we were soon back up to 60mph or so, slowly pulling away from Buzzi Bullet. We had now identified the rooster tail as Eraser 2 (the 1500hp Tecno Rib) and wondered why they had slowed - it later turned out to be fuel filter blockages on one engine which then couldn't pull full revs for sustained periods. They were effectively running on 1½ engines... bear in mind that's still around 1000hp!

As conditions flattened off past St Catherine's we were trimmed to the maximum and pleased to see speeds of 64mph or so (trust me, for our boat, that's good!) but this was nowhere near enough to catch Buzzi Bullet which was leaving us behind unbelievably quickly. The run up to Warner mark was in a fairly moderate chop and I'm sure we provided much amusement for Erasure 2 as we slowly edged past them in clouds of spray with our engines barking like mad as we left the water!

The run up through the forts toward Cowes, through the RYS line and on towards Yarmouth was uneventful but as we passed Hurst Castle for the second time we were slowing rapidly in the wind over tide conditions. The torque of 1½ Seateks proved too much for us, Eraser 2 started to close rapidly and before long we were again running side by side as we ventured out toward the Needles, a thrilling but exhausting ride. Conditions had deteriorated substantially by now and as we approached Bridge mark we were heading straight into very short, six-foot breaking seas. It wasn't the size of the seas that was difficult to handle but their steepness was horrible, the extra length and weight of Eraser 2 meant they were able to run around 2 knots more than we and they gradually edged past us again.

We could now see that the lead Buzzi Bullet had built up, (which had been about 5miles!) was down to about a mile as we were all coming out of race mode and into survival. Twice my legs gave way as we landed and things were now really hurting. I glanced once at the GPS and saw that all we could make was 25knots or so into seas such as these and I was unbelievably grateful to round the mark and set off with the seas behind us. Sadly, it was here that Premier Crew was to exit the series as they blew an engine in a big way, melted piston. We didn't know at the time but this meant we were now fighting Eraser 2 for third overall.

The wave height had increased substantially along the back of the island and we just could not quite catch them; their navigator/trimmer Paul Lemmer later told me the guys on board had been laying bets as to when the conditions would force us to back off...he told them we wouldn't...we didn't! As we plunged through St Catherine's race for the second time we caught them and had an unforgettable side by side tussle all the way back to the forts. We were shadowed constantly by the Sky TV helicopter as each crew hung on with massive determination, no prisoners taken; as we rounded No Mans Land fort we knew it would be a race right down to the line. Heading back up into the chop of the Solent we had to trim down a little but this enabled Eraser 2 to start catching us. I glanced over my shoulder and they were 100 metres back, I looked again and it was down to 10metres! The nature of the fuel problem meant they could run flat out at over 85mph for short periods

and had tried to use this ability to overhaul us! Very fortunately for us they tried too early and soon the engine in question cut back again and we were able to hold our slim lead.

As we entered the finish chute, we were unbelievably happy that Wettpunkt.com had been far enough ahead to complete the final small circuit off Cowes before we arrived, this meant we were flagged in as we crossed the RYS start/finish line, a big relief. As we turned for harbour we were approached by the Squadron rib, which presented us with a Union Jack - this we had been told at briefing is what the second & third finishers would receive. We must have seemed very confused as we were under the impression Buzzi Bullet was third and we were fourth ...we then learned of Premier Crew's enormously bad luck which had moved Buzzi Bullet into second place and us third overall plus second place in the RYA National Endurance series.

It was fantastic to be up on the podium after such a tough race and even better was the fact that every boat had largely been crewed by BIBOA members! The sense of achievement was enormous to have finished third in what had been by far the roughest and hardest race we had taken part in this year. It was reminiscent of the days when we used to race whatever the weather, even on some occasions when we set out to race in a true force 8 gale.... that really was crazy behaviour!

Thursday evening started as a very civilised event with drinks on the lawn of the Squadron but then sadly turned into a very silly but most enjoyable night of drinks, banter and micky taking as we joined certain bad influences at the Duke of York. The resulting hangover was certainly the best I've suffered for a long time!

Although on Sunday (Heat 1) and Thursday (Heat 2) we had endured two of the roughest races we had seen for a long time, the racing had been brilliant and now meant that on aggregate points Hannes Bohinc in Wettpunkt.com was in the lead, Erasure 2 lay second and we were one point behind Buzzi Bullet for third place. This meant that on Saturday there would be everything to play for and, as Chris Strickland rightly pointed out, after 250 nautical miles of racing we were still only half way through the Daily Mail British International Harmsworth series; anything could happen...

...and probably would!

Dave Deacon...*Hot Lemon*