President's Cup SUPPLEMENT

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FRAGRANT HARBOUR

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No hands, no wheel

◆ *London boatshow*

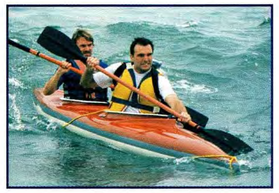
Land Rover

FOUR *peaks* RACE

MOBILE PHONE vs GMDSS

Macau and back

Land Rover Four peaks RACE



Determination (left), tacking to the windward mark (below left), and *Tipsy Free* powers across the start line (right)

Held over the weekend 22 and 23rd of February 2000, this year's Four Peaks Race started with promise — 21 boats and 12 to 15 knots of breeze. With both A and B divisions away at just after 11 on the Saturday morning, the boats were faced with a short beat to a windward mark, then out of Tai Tam Bay and across the Beaufort Channel for Sun Kong Island.

In Division A, there were 17 starters (*Shikari* had equipment problems and was left behind). In Division B, the two open boats from the Outward Bound — *Wing Fung* and *Yat Fung* — and their young, cheerful crews, ploughed through the big swells, with their first peak, Po Toi, not far off. The third Division B boat, *Kittiwake*, had engine problems and couldn't make the start in time.

Starter's orders (top), *Wing Fung* (above) and ascending Lantau Peak (bottom)

Two-time winner, *Wizard*, had a disappointing start but by the time the leaders had rounded Sun Kong and were running through the Beaufort / Po Toi gap, the IMX 38 had gained a lot of ground. Following a similar pattern to last year (and 1998), Leon Chan's *Tipsy Free*, Mike Barker's *X-Stream* and *Wizard* were the first to break out into open water past Castle Rock and settle in for the spinnaker run to Lantau Island.

Coming in to the drop off zone for the first peak, the fleet was surprisingly close, with Class II boats like Inge Strompf's X-99 *Fox in Sox* and Rick Haley's 42-foot Jeanneau *Disco Dancer* among the first wave ashore. Another early arrival was Jon Cannon's 48-foot Cheoy Lee, *Gecko*. *Wizard* lost time approaching the beach when caught in the lee of Shek Kwu Chau but nevertheless had its runners quickly into the water for a smooth landing in the deceptively strong surf. Others were not so lucky.

Of the 17 teams of runners that landed at Cheung Sha, at least 12 ended up in the water. It would almost seem that not enough attention is paid during training to this vital part of the Four Peaks Race. The sailing is one aspect, the running another. The two can only work together if there is an effective link: it may just be the time taken to jump from the boat to the pier (as in Sai Kung and Repulse Bay) or the half hour paddling from a becalmed boat near Shelter Island to the country park headland. Either way, a team's success depends on it.

Tipsy Free's two runners came ashore in a kayak, recorded impressive times up and down Lantau but, exhausted, were unable to get back through the building surf. Two crew were sent ashore in an inflatable to assist but even they were unable to get back through the breakers. Others had gone to the extent of landing in a kayak and then having a support team come in, retrieve their kayak, and return to the beach later in an inflatable to collect them. Another workable method was having one runner sit inside the kayak with the other pushing and aiming the boat through the surf and, when beyond the breakers, being towed through the water.

The ability to overcome difficulties, to improvise, improve and apply forethought are what the Four Peaks challenge is all about. It's no good leaving your kayak at the waterline and hoping it will be there when you come back. Worse than having to swim after it, you might find it filled with seawater, half buried in the sand. And if you think some kindly beach walker will pull it clear for you, be aware of your opposition's support crew waiting and watching nearby. Sure as anything that "help" will get you protested for outside assistance, especially if there is a dispute over the results.

Back on board, if the wind dies, you have to think of ways to keep the boat moving — along with the Outward Bound boats, *Windseeker* is noted for its use of long oars in light airs. And that's what happened later that night . . . and well into the next day.

Having picked up their runners and headed back to Lamma Island, the boats found themselves facing strong tides caused by a full moon. Luckily the wind held and Stenhouse was soon behind the leading teams as they romped back through the Beaufort Channel and turned left for Sai Kung. All were convinced that records were about to be broken. Breakfast back at the Aberdeen Boat Club; the buffet lunch at the very least.

It was all looking good 'til Table Island. Duck Rock. Then nothing. Nothing at all. Total zero.

Then it started to rain. Cold. Dark. Wet.

Some reported sitting for three hours. Others turned on their engines and took a penalty (after all, the runners want to run) and got into Port Shelter for a go at Ma On Shan — three boats finished using their engines. Four Peaks stalwart, *Windseeker*, one of only three finishers and 2nd in Class II, Division A, reached for its oars and kept moving. Just. So did *Disco Dancer*.

German endurance athlete, Stefan Schlett, comes ashore (above) and *Boss Hogg* feels the swells in the Beaufort Channel (bottom)

Others, 11 of them, realising they would never make the 1800 cut-off, decided to call it a day. Jon Cannon, who lives aboard *Gecko* in Hebe Haven, looked across the glassy, flat water of Port Shelter, looked down below, and went back to his mooring.

The time limit, incidentally, was the source of some discontent among competitors, having been adjusted at the skipper's briefing from 2100 to 1800. "That's 10% of your time knocked out," said *Trilogy* skipper Malcolm Brocklebank. It doesn't matter to boats like *Wizard* but a cut-off that's arbitrarily adjusted is not on. The original cut-off of 2400 was properly thought out and designed to give boats like *Trilogy* a chance. You simply can't do the speed required to finish the 90 nautical miles in time.

"Fair enough, if the race is only for the elite, then have a race *only* for the elite," he added. This, of course, is the danger all competitive events face. So, while organisers should make every effort to maintain and improve standards, they should always remember the level of the mid fleet. Especially in Hong Kong.

Stephen Davies, founder of the Four Peaks, pointed out that as fleets get bigger and faster, the bigger and faster boats tend to dominate everything from start times, to courses, to length of courses, through to cut-offs. "Recent changes in the Four Peaks Race favour the bigger, faster boats. The original downwind leg (from Sai Kung round to Lantau) has now become an upwind leg (Lantau to Sai Kung) and it kills small boats dead.

"If you wanted to make another change to the course and had a Port Shelter start with a downwind leg to Lantau, that would mean the inconvenience of boats — especially those with small engines — journeying to Hebe Haven the day before," said Davies. "Our original start venue was off Big Wave Bay (near Shek O Rock) because it was as near as dammit the same distance between all the clubs."

Going into Port Shelter, *Wizard* was just that little bit ahead of the other boats and had just enough wind to get its runners ashore. Coming out, they too resorted to rowing and later managed to catch a morning breeze back to Violet Hill, the last of the peaks before the finish off Middle Island.

Wizard finished at 11:07, four and a half hours ahead of Rick Haley's *Disco Dancer* and John Blay's *Windseeker* which came in at 15:55. The three motoring yachts finished at 11:15 (*Trilogy*), 17:17 (*Tamarisk*) and 17:31 (*Shearwater V*)

For most, a disappointing end to a great start but, then again you can't always expect perfect conditions. Sailing isn't like that, neither is running.