

The Four Peaks Race is one of the toughest events on Hong Kong's sporting calendar. Eighty challenging sea miles. Four rugged peaks (totalling 2,422 metres). And winter weather.

Normally the race is held in January but Chinese New Year (23-25.Jan.12) complicated things and, for the 28th staging, the event was held on the 4th and

FOUR PEAKS RACE

5th of February 2012. Defending Div A (IRC) champion, *Wicked*, skippered by Tristan Stewart, faced hot contenders *Red Kite II* (Olivier Decamps), *Whiskey Jack* (Nick Southward) and *Black Jack* (Glenn Smith), all out to snatch the top prize as the fleet got away at 1100 on Saturday in brisk conditions. Leaving Tai Tam Bay, it was dark horse, *Circus* (Angus Harris), new to the race, which was well in the lead.

But *Black Jack* was looking strongest as it reached Ma On Shan. The crew had a killer app: unseen by others, they launched a kayak and runners Daniel Brown and Pierre Arnaud Lemagnan streaked ashore while the other boats struggled with almost no wind. Even flying spinnakers to within metres of landing could not get *Wicked* or *Red Kite II*'s runners ashore fast enough to regain the lead.

Through the long, testing hours ahead, the wind dropped as Violet Hill and Lantau Peak were ticked off the list. Still *Black Jack* held on to its lead. Then, just south of Cheung Chau at 0300 on Sunday morning, they parked for 50 minutes. No wind.

Red Kite II reeled them in and hit the beach for Lamma Island's Mt Stenhouse just 10-15 minutes behind. *Wicked* was just five minutes away. Mt Stenhouse was its usual trap for the unwary — this time it even claimed



veterans. A *Wicked* runner impaled himself on a spike in the undergrowth in the dark, but gamely completed both ascent and descent despite the pain.

At the finish, one and a half intense hours later, *Black Jack*'s once seemingly unassailable 53-minute lead was whittled down to just seven. Gone were hopes of a clean sweep of the three top prizes. The premier IRC handicap prize was snatched by *Red Kite II*, although *Black Jack* took line honours and the HKPN handicap prizes. *Wicked* took 3rd place and a three-year record of a 'top three' placing.

In the B division for the smaller, slower and older boats, 49-year-old *Koala* had to retire when rough seas opened seams. That left a battle between relative newcomer, *Banter* (Rob Sallons), and seasoned campaigner and long-term champion, *Rhapsody* (Jack Ng). *Banter* took an early lead and held onto

it through Violet Hill, Stenhouse and Peak 300 at Hok Tsui to the finish. It wasn't enough to hold off *Rhapsody* on handicap, so the little Sonata 8 took the Division B trophy.

Herman Wong, first-time Four Peaks skipper of *Fuzzy Duck*, finished the race at 1750 on Sunday, the last boat home. For this he won the Fiddler's Folly Flask and the Fragrant Harbour Spirit of the Race prize (a personal locator beacon with GPS).

What a shame the race got tangled with another outdoor event, the Hong Kong Marathon (5.Feb.12), as missing from the fleet this year were regulars *Tipsy Frenz* and *GA*. Ah well, there's always the 29th Four Peaks Race . . .

