



Teaching an old sea dog new tricks



THIS year has seen me race in the Powerboat PI World Championships all over Europe but with no race on the calendar in the UK I started looking for other options as I really wanted to race on home waters.

Looking at the RYA Offshore Powerboat calendar my obvious choice was the Cowes-Torquay-Cowes race over the August bank holiday weekend.

First I had to find someone willing to lend me a boat. I knew I needed an excellent endurance boat and it was a no-brainer, it had to be a Scorpion.

Having raced against record-breaking Scorpions such as Hot Lemon and Seahound for many years and after seeing the way the all-girl team handled the Scorpion Dubois Sting in last year's Round Britain Powerboat Race I knew it would be the perfect boat for me.

So I cheekily contacted Patrick Byrne the owner of Scorpion RIBs and

persuaded him to lend me a boat. It didn't take him long to say yes.

Now all I needed was a crew. My brain wave continued while I was sitting in the BBC Radio Solent Studio for the H2O show with Sir Robin Knox-Johnston.

Knowing how he likes a challenge I thought why not ask Robin if he would navigate for me? Although a complete novice in a powerboat, who better to have on board than one of the most famous navigators in the world?

I wasn't at all confident that Robin would accept but he agreed instantly and asked when we could start training!

With Robin on board, Neil Sackley, producer of the H2O show, also agreed to the challenge so the team was now three. To complete the package Tracey Clarke, the third presenter of the show agreed to be our team manager, a role she is more than used to and she was invaluable keeping three egos in order!

So training began. Two weeks before the race I took Team Scorpion to Andark Diving and Watersports Centre in Southampton for Helicopter

Underwater Escape Training more commonly known to powerboat racers as the "Dunk" test.

It comprises three simulated ditches in the custom built 'Dunker' – a capsule representative of the cabin of helicopters and small aircraft. The test is a vital part of powerboat racing training especially if racing in a canopied boat. Although it was not a mandatory part of pre-race qualification for our type of boat, it is a definite safety procedure that all racers should undertake.

Pre Race training in the Solent found us our final crew member as Ben Wood of Scorpion RIBs joined us to show us what the Sting could do. He was our team engineer having been involved with building the boat we knew his knowledge could be invaluable if we had a problem during the race.

My attentions then turned to race day. With a strong fleet of more than 20 Endurance race boats entering the race, I briefed Team Scorpion that in a standard production boat and with our power to weight ratio compared to the race boats, a top ten finish



The Team Scorpion crew and Lady Vi

and first in our class would see me extremely chuffed and a great result for the team.

As for the race, to say it was BIG is a lie, conditions were huge!

We were in for a bumpy ride and I now wondered whether Team Scorpion's novice powerboat racers would manage.

My reservations were short lived, Team Scorpion and the RIB were second to none and I wouldn't have been with any other team for the race.

The 33-foot Scorpion Sting never missed a beat. She handled the rough conditions perfectly and was certainly in better shape than her crew by the end of the race.

We were aiming a top ten finish and first in class so to manage overall fourth was an astounding result

considering that we had spent little time in the boat as a team.

We took our class title, Sir Robin was awarded the MEMA Trophy for being the oldest competitor, we also picked up the Motor Boat and Yachting Trophy for fourth overall and I was awarded the Ladies Trophy for the second year running.

It was the toughest endurance race I have ever been involved in and I could not be more proud. Only nine out of the 20 boats that crossed the start line made it home. That was a superb testament to Team Scorpion's skills and to their RIB's endurance capabilities.

Thank you guys.

Roll of honour

My navigator – Robin:

The old sea dog certainly has some life in him yet and as we crossed Weymouth Bay he directed me further inshore towards the coast in the hopes of finding calmer water. The moved paid off. Although the sea was only very slightly calmer we managed to make up two places during the manoeuvre, overtaking the would-be winners Cinzano as they stayed out in rougher seas.

The crew:

I must admit I took a battering on the race so how BBC H2O producer Neil Sackley was feeling I can only imagine. Neil was a complete novice when it comes to boating but stood

his ground through very rough conditions that saw other teams drop out. He was a real asset to have on the team and even managed to report live three times to BBC Radio Solent during the race using a Bluetooth connection through our unfaltering DS Development Neptune communication systems. But I must give praise to the unsung hero, Ben Wood. At one point I was having difficulty steering and throttling at the same time. I asked Ben to come forward to help me throttle so I could concentrate on steering our way through the rough seas. His knowledge of the boat and how she handles were invaluable.

The competition:

Congratulations to Cinzano, Hot Lemon and Team Relentless who beat us back to Cowes and to all those who competed in the race. Well done because to finish was certainly an achievement.

The kit:

Special thanks to Scorpion RIBs for a first class boat. Raymarine's C170 chart plotter was essential in assisting my very able navigator and did not falter. Predator World provided us with VX360 Helmet cameras meaning we could catch every minute of our epic rollercoaster ride. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76L822Z2YA0>



Left to right: Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, Ben Woods, Shelley Jory, Neil Sackley

Photo: JDP Sullivan

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