

Going Ballistic

Paris Part Deux

Toby Budd heads back to Falmouth after completing the Paris Marathon. We conclude his adventure and find out how well the three man team and Ballistic One fared.

After travelling 500 miles from Falmouth, via Le Havre and up the river Seine we arrived in Paris on April 7th 2006.

We made the journey aboard 'Ballistic One', a 7.8m Ballistic RIB powered by a 250 HP Yamaha four-stroke outboard in just over five days.

We now found ourselves in the bustling and vibrant heart of France. My crew Matt together with his father and sister as well as my girlfriend Rose were to compete in the Paris Marathon in two days on Sunday April 9th.

A hectic lead up of sightseeing, eating, drinking, reading and more eating soon bought us to Sunday morning and the day of the race. At 0800 four nervous looking, lycra covered runners emerged from their respective hotel rooms and quietly made their way to the tube station. The city was alive with excitement as runners from across the world began to flow through the city's streets and subways towards les Champs-Élysées. We soon had our

nervous runners as they were absorbed into the throbbing mass of 35,000 runners all lining up for the start.

After stopping for the obligatory red wine and cheese served to runners regularly along the length of the course, all our runners completed the race together and proudly crossed the finish line in just over 5 hours.

A great achievement for all that took part and an inspiring day for all. I always admire those who strive to achieve something that pushes them to excel, to move their boundaries and live their dreams.

After much moaning we retired to the hotel where a hot shower and clean sheets, followed by a hearty Parisian feast were the order of the day. This would be our last meal in Paris as the following morning we were due to depart, boarding "Ballistic One" and returning along the Seine and up the Channel to Falmouth and home.

The following morning we boarded the RIB at 0900, we were joined by Matt's wife Katy and father Brian who were to join us as far as Le Havre. After filling with 50 litres



By mid afternoon we arrived in Conflans Ste Honorine, this large river port sees over 40,000 barges a year mooring here and is bustling with other river traffic too. We needed to stop for fuel so trolled the shore line for a petrol station, to our delight we found a fuel barge that served petrol and eagerly took on a full compliment of 250 litres that bought our blinking fuel gauge to full for the first time in what seemed like an eternity. This

cobbled streets, passed the church of "Notre -Dame" where Saint Louis is said to have been baptised before arriving at an agreeable looking pizzeria.

After a large Pizza Reine and bottle of house red we went our separate ways, the cool cycle ride back to the marina helped me put the trip in perspective and I began to look forward to the following day where we planned to travel over 140 km downstream to Rouen.

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from the local petrol station we locked out into the surging river just after 1030, the current grabbed our small RIB as soon as we cleared the lock entrance and once more we were underway on a cold overcast spring morning.

A long list of signals, lights and regulations are used to control traffic on this busy waterway. Before we left I completed my ICC with CENVI endorsement and this is essential for anyone thinking of venturing into European Waterways. As we departed Paris we regularly had to stop and wait for the appropriate lights to show, switch sides, hold for larger commercial traffic and adhere to the numerous other restrictions and controls that govern your craft's navigation.

Fuel was, as ever, a concern and we stopped several times in the first day to run ashore and collect fuel from nearby fuel stations. Despite this we made excellent progress, clearing a good number of locks and eating up the miles as we went. At semi planing cruising speed the boat was noticeably more nose up with the additional two crew, to solve this we took it in turns to lie on the bow sun deck in sleeping bags, this made a huge difference and we could achieve the same speed for much less RPM, reducing our fuel consumption significantly.

was excellent news and meant we could now proceed without the tedious and obligatory fuel stops for at least another 250 km. We set off just before 1600 in the hope of making Poissy where we planned to spend the night. After locking through at Andresy we arrived at the small industrial town just after 1700, there was no safe mooring in the town so I unloaded crew and gear and set off for a marina 2 km downstream. After securing the boat and setting the alarm I set back to town on my bike. After spending the whole day rushing around and getting as many miles under our belt as possible I enjoyed the relaxed cycle along the shores of the river. It is all too easy to shut yourself off from the world around you when you're in a hurry, it's not until you really slow down that you come to really appreciate your surroundings and notice the detail and small things that bring places and people alive.

I found the others in the small hotel café, I am always worried when I leave the boat at night and I decided that after dinner I would leave the others to their hotel and return to sleep on the boat. We set off down the town's

The following morning I reluctantly crawled from my cozy down sleeping bag, it was bitterly cold as I peeled back the frozen cover and I found a heavy fog sitting cold and still on the slowly moving river.

I made my way back through the freezing fog to find my eager crew wrapped in just about every item of clothing they had. Shivering, cold and stiff they climbed aboard and we set off in silence, tucked well inside our oilskins, for Rouen.

The first three hours were excruciating, the cold fog cut through us as we stood frozen behind the console. You couldn't leave your hand exposed for more than a minute before it would be numb with cold. By 1000 we were all completely frozen and desperate to warm ourselves. Rounding a sharp bend in the river found us approaching a small riverside village with a set of empty barge moorings. We tied up and set ashore for the small café/tabac, entering the smoke filled bar we made for a table as the bar man bought over fresh coffee and croissants. Breakfast had never tasted so good and slowly but surely we began to move

again as the hot coffee took effect and life began to flow once more through our veins.

By the time we set off again the sun was beginning to warm the cold morning air and this made the whole experience much more pleasurable. It turned out to be a cracking day and our early start put us bang on schedule for a civilised arrival in Rouen.

By 1600 the boat was squared away on the pontoon outside the police station and we were on our way into town to find a hotel. After finding the first eight hotels full we found a small seedy establishment that said they could manage two rooms, it was our only hope and as what looked like a hoard of eastern Europeans were bundled down the stairs we were shown to our basic rooms.

The plan for the following day was to make the remaining passage of 120 km to Honfleur, a small fishing harbour just outside Le Havre. We woke to an overcast day and set off at a leisurely 1000, after clearing the town's speed limit we bought the boat up onto the plane and enjoyed the relatively fast progress of 28 km/h,



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the speed limit that exists on the tidal stretch of the river.

As we came into the afternoon the wind began to freshen, this was not a problem but as we turned our final corner the previously land locked horizon opened up to show a sharp sea landscape full of breaking waves and white horses. With a solid force six wind against a 5 knot current we made painfully slow progress through the steep waves, under the Pont de Normandie and into the contrasting calm of Honfleur lock. We had not been dressed or prepared for sea conditions after the relative calm of the river and had been caught slightly unprepared so I was glad to make fast in the lock at Honfleur.

Honfleur has a magical 15th century fort, the harbour is surrounded by period houses with slate covered roofs. We spent a very enjoyable afternoon, night and morning in cozy port as a raging westerly howled down the angry river outside.

Katy and Brian left us the following morning to return to the UK and after a very long breakfast and a check of the forecast Matt and I decided to set off for Falmouth the following morning when the wind was due to ease. With the lock at Le Havre not open till 0900 we decided to lock out that afternoon and head across to Le Havre where we could refuel and spend the night before leaving first thing for home.

After donning our dry-suits we locked out at 1400 and emerged into six foot standing waves and solid force six westerly. We could make little more than a couple of knots



through the water but were doing 7 knots over the ground. Despite only being a stone's throw away we made Le Havre in just over an hour and made fast to the fuel pontoon. It took some time to fuel up as the self service fuel machine only accepted the local credit card and we had to bribe passers by with cash to let us use their card but after some perseverance we were full. That evening we ate at the same restaurant we had dined at before and enjoyed the calm and comfort of the restaurant before setting off into the cold misery that we knew awaited us the following morning.

After a cold night aboard we set off at 0630 under a miserable overcast sky, an

uncomfortable slop greeted us as we made our way towards Cherbourg. The ride was hard and uncomfortable, the wind had dropped but a confused sea was still running and we would often land hard after cresting a wave, jarring our bones and grinding our teeth. Luckily the conditions slowly improved and three hours out we were up to 20 knots and only a couple of hours away from fuel and lunch. We arrived in Cherbourg just as the fuel attendant was setting off for his lunch break and took on fuel. Making the most of the marina café we enjoyed a large Caesar salad and last French coffee before climbing back aboard for the final leg to Falmouth.

PARIS MARATHON

A predictable sea state gave us a comfortable but bumpy ride back to Falmouth and as we closed on land we were able to ramp up the speed to a respectable 35 knots. We closed on St Anthony Lighthouse with the sun low on the horizon, it was 1800 by the time we had made fast and then it was straight to the local pub for a much awaited pint of bitter and some English pub grub with lashings of chips.

THE WORLD PILOT GIG CHAMPIONSHIPS

Ten days later and it was time to board our trusty RIB once more and head to Scilly where we were to compete in the "World Pilot Gig Championships".

On a clear morning Darren (Stroke rower for my team) picked me up and drove to Mylor where the boat was moored. I brought the RIB around to the quay so we could unload the tents, kites and gear straight into the boat. We had arranged to meet fellow

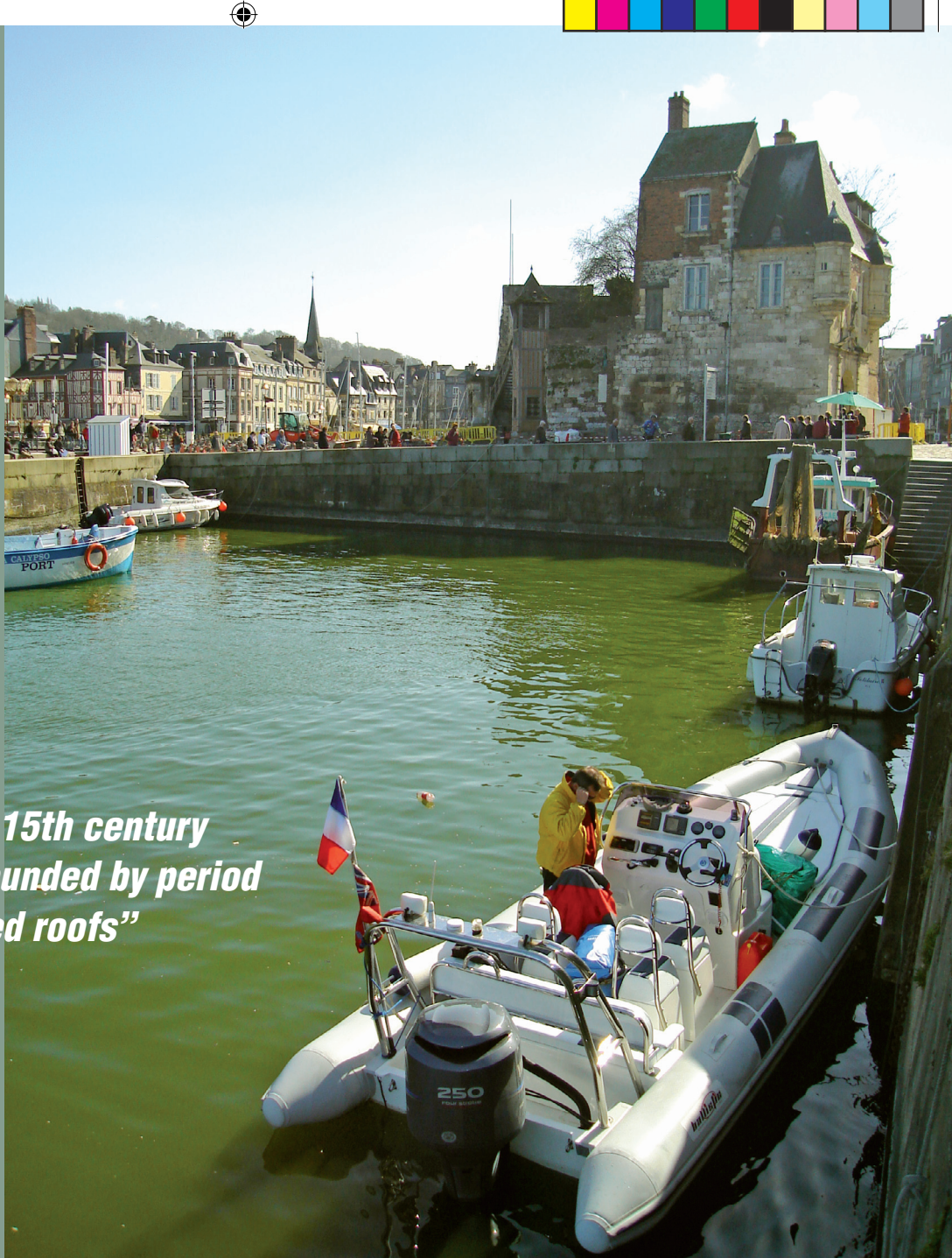
"Honfleur has a magical 15th century fort, the harbour is surrounded by period houses with slate covered roofs"

team mate Mike Hutch and crew Toddy at the Manacles Cardinal at 0700 and so at 0645 we left the moorings and with the Carrick Roads and Falmouth Bay to ourselves set off south towards the Manacles. It was a glorious morning with the sun slowly rising over the eastern horizon. Both RIBs were comfortably making 25 knots in the slight rolling swell as we rounded the Lizard and turned west for Scilly. We had arranged to stop at Wolf Rock for coffee and Saffron buns so at 0830 we pulled up under the isolated lighthouse and jumped aboard the 7.5m Coastline RIB powered by a 130hp Mercruiser for a truly inspiring breakfast.

Heading off again into the large ocean swell we enjoyed perfect RIB conditions. Powering up, the Ballistic with its powerful 250 HP Yamaha would drive us forward into the swell at an exhilarating 50 knots, this felt like the sea state the Ballistic's hull was built for. The ride was fantastic and she dealt superbly with the oncoming swell as we literally flew towards Scilly.

We arrived in Scilly at 0900 and made fast to the visitors pontoon. After inflating the small tender we made our way ashore to find the others in their rented house overlooking the harbour. After a long breakfast/brunch/lunch we returned to the RIBs which were now grounded on the ebbing spring tide, unloaded the gear, carrying it across the white sand in bare feet to the rented house.

We spent three days in Scilly, gig racing, walking, kiting and exploring in the RIBs. They really are the ideal vessel for these exposed and isolated islands and every time I



return I find another inflatable or RIB bobbing on the harbour moorings.

The gig racing went well and the sight of 120 gigs lined up for the start off St Agnes is guaranteed to take your breath away. We came in at a respectable 56th, something we were happy with as it was our first race as a team, many of whom had only just started rowing.

On a sunny Monday morning we left to return to Falmouth, the fine weather and settled forecast had attracted some extra crew and so with four up on each boat we set off with the cunning plan of visiting everywhere starting with 'P' on the way home. One of the best ribbing days I have ever experienced followed and after a cracking cruise back to Penzance for lunch, a quick hop in the midday sun around to Porthleven for afternoon tea and a sundown cruise around the Lizard and into Port Navas for a few pints we returned to Falmouth happy and content and ready as ever for some hot home cooking and a warm bed.

Toby Budd

