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FEATURE ARTICLE

Around New Zealand - Swashbucklers - June/July 2007

The Longway Around -
Swashbucklers Flying Pirates Around NZ Record

After successfully setting a new trans-Tasman record from the Sydney Harbour Bridge to Auckland Harbour Bridge last year of 40 hours 31 minutes and 26 seconds, the Swashbucklers Flying Pirates successfully set a new record for around New Zealand in early March. This time they were raising money as they went for the New Zealand Coastguard.

The Swashbucklers Flying Pirates crew of Adam Wickes, Paul Rix, Shag & Squid Gibbs departed from under the Auckland Harbour Bridge at 0400 hours on Thursday March 1st and returned, crossing under the bridge in the early hours of March 4th, setting a new record for the circumnavigation of New Zealand in a power boat, in a time of 69 hours, 44 minutes, 56 seconds. Perhaps the most noticeable factor about the attempt was that the boat's previous skipper and owner, the man behind the whole attempt, Ginger Gibbs, was absent.

Ginger passed away suddenly on the 17th of January, just weeks before he was to attempt the new record. If anyone ever asked Ginger why he wanted to do a trans-Tasman record and around New Zealand record his response was simply "because I can" one of his favourite sayings.

He was passionate about racing, whether it be jetboats or offshore racing and after the success of the trans-Tasman record and some bantering from patrons at his Swashbucklers restaurant and members of the Marine Industry, his sights soon became focused on the around New Zealand Record.

After Ginger's death, it wasn't immediately known if the record attempt would still go ahead; a lot of the ground work had already been done, but there was still a lot to be picked up and carried on with. However Ginger's family soon gave their blessing that the attempt should still go ahead, Adam Wickes, Navigator and Medic, stepped in as Team Leader. Adam had already spent over 20 years in the Coastguard, and as Sales Manager at Rayglass Boats, the manufacturer of Ginger's 12m Rayglass Protector, he had plenty of experience to contribute.

The team engineer, Paul Rix was also back onboard and as his day job is as Sales Engineer for Volpower New Zealand, the New Zealand importers of Volvo Penta engines, his job was to make sure the boat's twin Volvo Penta D6-350 DPR sterndrives kept running smoothly for the trip.

Daniel Hedges was originally supposed to be part of the team, but prior commitments with Emirates Team New Zealand in Valencia meant he couldn't be a part of the Around New Zealand record attempt.

Ginger's two brothers, Shag and Squid stepped in to fill the two spots vacated by Ginger and Daniel. Both are very experienced skippers who know the New Zealand waters well and like Ginger, after many years at sea were well experienced to ensure the record would be set.



The shore crew of Nigel Hawkes and Rusty Allport, lead the logistical side on land, shadowing the swasbucklers boat as they went around the country.

While the crew for the water was set, a bunch of Ginger's motorcycling mates formed the Riding Pirates were to ride the country, tailing the boat, raising money and awareness for Coastguard as they went.

Like the trans-Tasman record, there was a great deal of preparation to be made. However, it was predicted that it would be a lot more difficult.

It was a whole new ball game to attempt; the ocean is totally different from coastal waters. Weather patterns change much more quickly. In the ocean we had the big rolling swells, whereas for coastal waters we were preparing for short and sharp conditions, said Adam Wickes.

The team had been studying the weather patterns for some time; speargear by Shag, and had planned to leave anytime between mid February and April, with the call being finally made to depart at 0400 on March 1st.

We knew that we weren't going to get 100 percent good weather but if we felt we were going to get 75 percent or better then we would make the call and go, said Adam.

The around New Zealand trip was also different from the trans-Tasman trip in that the crew knew that they could always run to shore if ever there was a problem. They had a support vehicle tracking them from land which was loaded with every conceivable item the team thought they might need but couldn't carry on board with them. This included drive units, turbo chargers, intercooler, windscreen framings, wipers almost everything that the team thought could possibly break.

Ginger had also made sure that all of the crew would be kitted out with the latest in safety gear, including warm wet weather clothing, inflatable lifejackets with flares and lights, and GPS lifetags so that if someone went overboard, the boat would be able to double back to their position.

The first leg of the trip was up the eastern coast of Northland, going anti-clockwise to fit in with the expected weather patterns. The conditions were a little bit shitty when we left Auckland, but we handled it and managed to maintain about 30knots from leaving Auckland all the way up to the top.

Due to the weather conditions by the time the team rounded Cape Reinga, they were four hours behind from where they would have liked to have been. The weather was supposed to have died off but it hadn't, slowing their progress. The team then made the decision to hug the coast all the way own as far as the Hokianga harbour, where at that point the weather started to improve and they changed course and headed out, making a bee line to their first scheduled stop, New Plymouth.

The team arrived in New Plymouth about six hours later than they had anticipated, about 10pm on March 1st. After their short refuelling stop in New Plymouth, the team headed around Mt Taranaki to run straight down the West Coast of the South Island, heading for Bluff at a cruising speed of 30-35knots.

We had an awesome trip through the night; because we were behind a bit, there was a full moon and everything was working well, we went a bit faster than we had originally planned. Our initial intention had been to run a little slower at night just in case we came across something.

The team arrived into Bluff at 4.30pm on March 2nd; having been guided in by the Riverton Coastguard. We had a slight hiccup in Bluff; the fuel bowser we were intending to use had broken earlier in the day before our arrival so we were forced to use the commercial one which of course didn't fit our fuel filler. So fuel was dribbled in while the team frantically cut the top off a drink bottle to make an impromptu fuel funnel. The team spent just over an hour at Bluff and while the boat was being refuelled, grabbed a hot meal and a quick rest. They then left Bluff just after 5pm and set course up the Eastern coast of the South Island.

Just before dark the revs went up on one of the engines; stopping; the team discovered they had broken the tips off one of the propellers; an eventuation they were predicting and had planned for.

We knew it would happen; when you have a 10-tonne boat full of fuel being pushed by a few small blades at 35knots; something's got to give.

After getting going again, a temp alarm went off on the port-side engine. They pulled the revs back and the temperature dropped, so they stopped and checked all the water pick-ups and everything seemed to be fine. Underway again, the temperature came straight back up.

We decided to stop again and clear out the raw water strainers, which were where we found the remains of a small fish jammed in the intake of the water cooling for the port motor. We lost 30 minutes we suppose that's what you

get when you're travelling with two fishermen onboard! Or perhaps Ginger was looking down on us, thinking we were having a too easier trip. The team had a beautiful trip through the night; encountering the plethora of squid boats off the Canterbury coast; which in the darkness looked like UFOs on the horizon.

Just off the coast of Gisborne the revs went up again; meaning the boat had done another set of propellers, forcing the team to limp into port and get another set of propellers from the support vehicle which was there to meet them.

The weather turned on them off the Bay of Plenty, forcing the boat to slow to as little as 12-15knots. A scheduled three-hour crossing towards the Mercury Islands soon turned into six hours.

Shag and Squid were on the radio to local fishermen, who were saying that the weather was perfect where they were yet we were stuck in some really gnarly stuff.

However, 10 nautical miles off the back of the Mercury Islands the weather dropped and rounding Cape Colville it was flat calm; so the throttles went down and away they went for the sprint home.

The Flying Pirates crossed under the Auckland Harbour bridge in the early ours of March 4th, well and truly breaking the record held by John Taylor, Ron Archer, Fred Hoogveld and Bruce Douglas in their Genesis 3200 powered by twin Johnson Oceanrunner outboards.

We planned for adversity and trained for things to go wrong and hoped that they wouldn't. We geared up for as much as we thought could go wrong, for the safety of ourselves and for the boat. Nothing on the boat was broken, the engines were fine; the only things we broke were propellers said Adam. Would they do it again? Well, records are made to be broken; so I'd love for someone to have a crack at it which would be the best compliment the team could get; and if they break it; I'd definitely be back to do it again, he added.

The trip:

Auckland to New Plymouth - 492.856miles @3100rpm/36.5knots.

[13.5hrs@1390L](#)

New Plymouth to Bluff 636.589miles @3100rpm/36.5knots.

[17.4hrs@1796.41L](#)

Bluff to Gisbourne 658.669miles @3100rpm/36.5knots. [18hrs@1858.71L](#)

Gisbourne to Auckland 284.599miles @3100rpm/36.5knots.

[07.8hrs@0803.1L](#)

Total 2072miles @103LPH 5849L

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