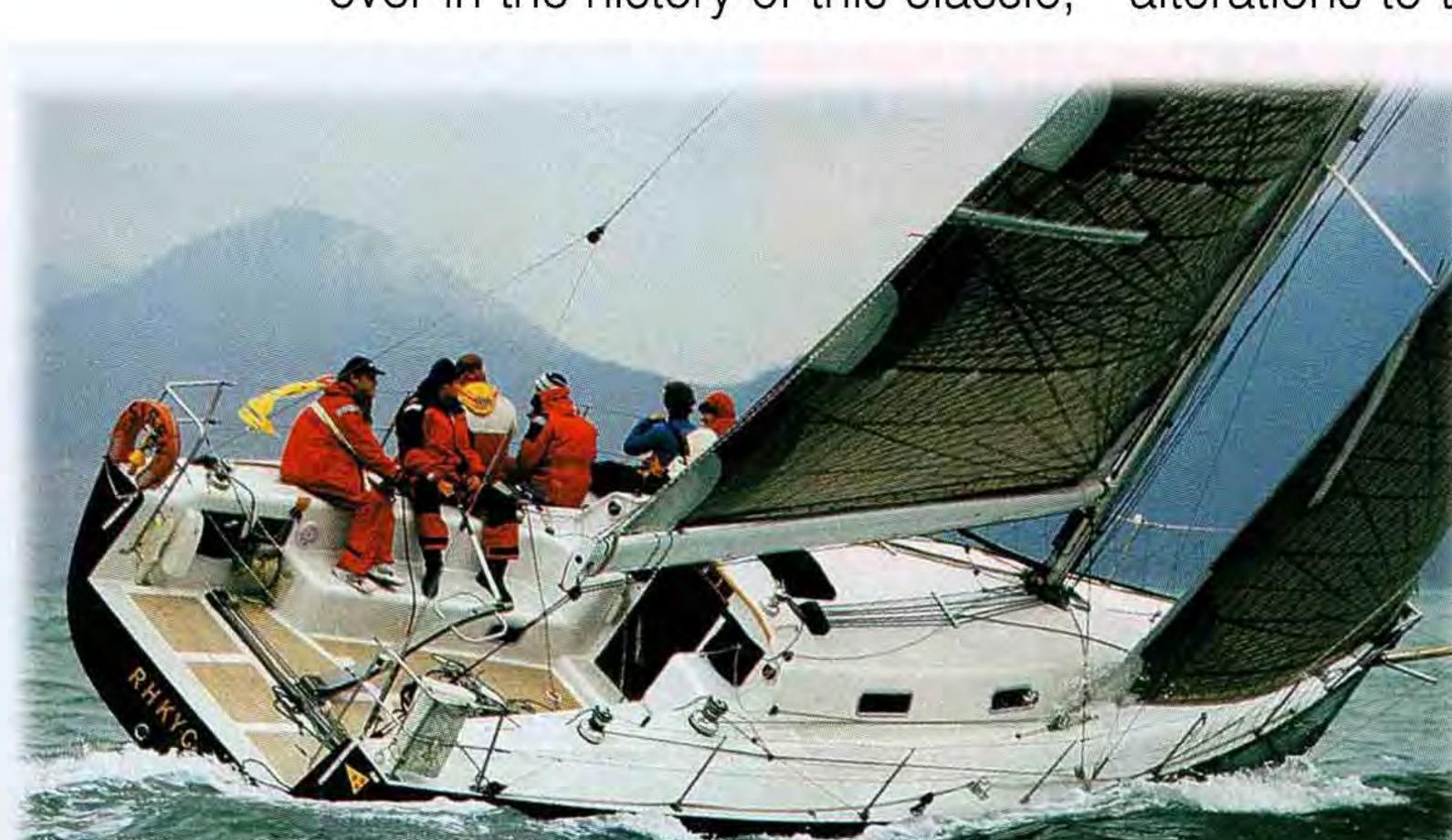


Wizard returns to win one of the fastest and coldest races ever

onday 9th February dawned dry, sunny and — for a winter's day — relatively warm. A sharp contrast to the preceding two days — the weekend of the 7th & 8th of February — the dates chosen for the 20th anniversary of the Four Peaks Race. It was possibly the foulest weather



and set the stage for numerous tales of heroism, despair and camaraderie which will be shared over many ales for years to come. Needless to say, 2003's mild and windless conditions have been consigned to the history books!

A quick glance at the race instructions to check on the rumoured changes to "propelling the boat" in the drop zones revealed many more ever in the history of this classic, alterations to the instructions. In

> fact, it soon became apparent the rules had written. For a race of this type involving an intricate mix of sailing, kayaking and

running, this necessitated an entirely new game plan!

By Monday's deadline, the entry in Division A was disappointing — 12 boats and, with the windless weather at the time, it was beginning to look like one Four Peaks to miss. However, by Saturday morning, there had been a number of late entries and more importantly, a northerly monsoon had arrived.

Many of the regular crews were back, but some in different boats. Wizard this year had a new owner, but certainly not newcomer to the event, Jim completely re- Fernie, and his crew. Fernie, from the Discovery Bay Yacht Club, brought with him plenty of experience from three previous attempts in Arconia, including a 2nd place overall in Div A in 2002. With a pedigree like this,

you can't fail to do well. And he did!

Previous owner of Wizard and successful campaigner in many Four Peaks, Cathy Delany, chartered the twitchy B32, Bits & Pieces. Regrettably, previous Class winner, Getafix had been sold and its crew disbanded, some to other boats.

returnee in his new boat Siren, was Anthony Day, a skipper with plenty of Four Peaks experience in the Said skipper Impala, Boss Hogg, and with Vic Locke in

Bugis, and more recently in *Kiboko*.

The Farr Side, entered previously in 1994 as Intrigue, made another rare appearance, crewed mainly by hashmen. One of them, John Berry, a Four Peaks committee member for many years, later won due admiration for his approaches at next year to both Sai Kung and Repulse Bay. Berry has honed these skills over 11 years in *Tamarisk* (his own boat, lost off its mooring in a storm last year). Also among The Farr Side team were members from another regular entry, Shearwater V, which was missing this year.

The Impalas had just one representative — Taxi, which opted to enter IRC Class I for a change. With few other boats entering for Classes II and III, the race committee

decided to combine these two classes into one class of five boats.

There was a vigorous start at 1100 in Tai Tam Bay, with a brisk 15-knot breeze blowing and most crews in full heavy weather gear. Once past the weather mark, boats freed off for Fury Rocks before hardening up into the northerly wind for the long tack out towards the Nine Pins. Siren quickly built up a lead, as other boats split tacks with some going closer to Steep.

Ariki III had difficulty making the windward mark. Graeme Large, "We made two attempts because of the adverse tide and on the second attempt cleared by at least (!) six inches." Ariki had more problems making headway into the steep chop under reduced sail and retired. "This was the worst performance I have ever put in," said Large. "It was going to be my last Four Peaks, but I shall

have to be back redeem myself!"

Windseeker chose the route through Trio, but lost ground tacking several times in the shifting wind pattern. The northerly allowed boats to make it all the way past Table and Shelter Islands

to the Country Park peninsular on one tack before tacking a few times up to the drop-off at to Kam Loong.

the public steps on the Sai Kung waterfront.

With the wind holding at around 10 knots, there were few problems getting out of Port Shelter this year. In fact, the leg out

around

HESTERTON



Runners from 10 boats were up Ma On Shan in quick succession between 1500 and 1600, churning up the soft ground, particularly near the summit, already slippery from

Once around Sun Kong, it was a close fetch for those

the Nine Pins unexpectedly

turned out to be the only real

spinnaker leg in the entire race.

dropping at Stanley. Kam Loong initially — continued

Tipsy Free beats to the windward mark (top left), Anthony Day's

Siren (bottom left), runners back on board Better Half, Cheung Sha

beach (above) and Div A winner, Wizard (left)

the light rain. Siren was first in but lost its lead over the summit

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for a Chung Hom Kok drop-off but skipper, Jack Mallee, said the sea conditions on arrival didn't allow a landing on the rocks. So they switched to Repulse Bay instead, losing valuable time.

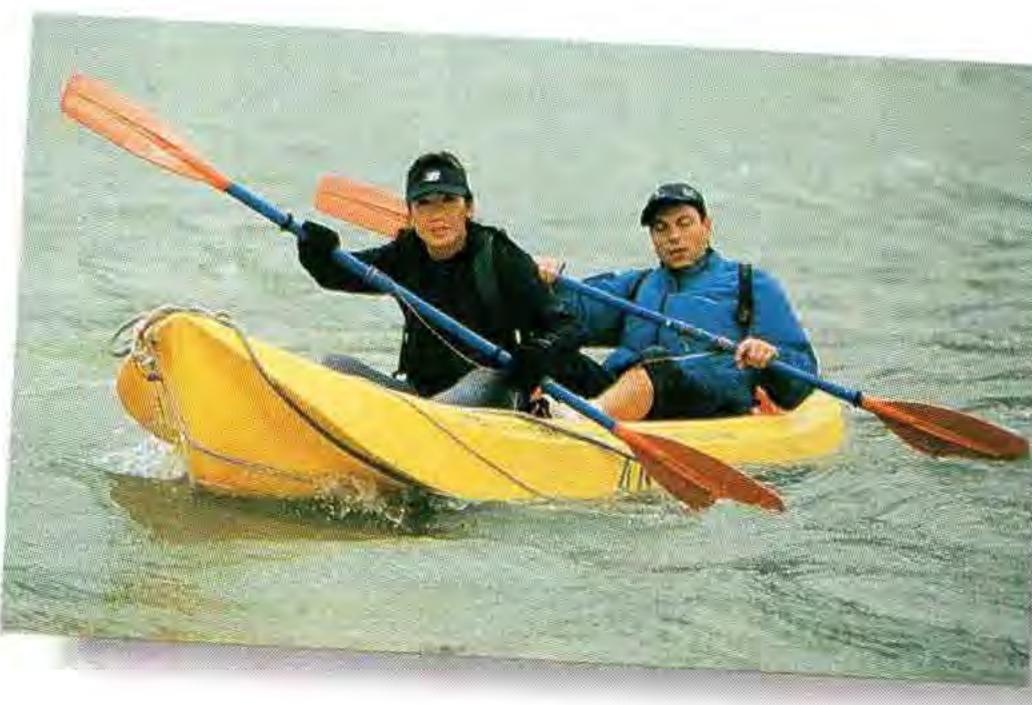
Other boats also found themselves making late tactical changes. Just as for Stenhouse, of the battle. the landing tactics for Violet Hill are critical and crews making the right drop off and pick up decisions can gain valuable time. This is where practice in daylight is essential.

Recognising your drop off point after dark can be tricky, preceding week's Force 7 but of course is necessary especially for the shore party. For them,

identifying a familiar landing point provides a huge confidence boost. Going in and getting ashore safely becomes the

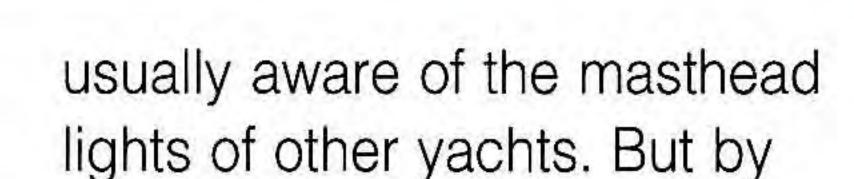
This year, despite the northerly wind, the waves, coupled with

the swell built up during the



offshore, made most landings hazardous. Judging the right time to make a Lamma. dash for it is also important. Of course, it goes without saying that kayaking experience in all weathers makes for a successful landing in such conditions.

When crossing the Lamma Channel after dark on the way to Stenhouse, one is



this time, and with the alternative strategies available for Violet Hill, who they are becomes more of a guessing

More masthead lights are usually spotted on the way past the Rocky Harbour drop-off point

eastern knowing the identity of the various yachts

awaiting returning kayaks can be most frustrating.

> Tension mounts as lights appear on turning the final corner into the small rocky bay on the south side of Lamma. It is only here that all is revealed and the uncertainty turns into elation — or disappointment as other yachts are identified at close



followed by Windseeker and then Siren in Div A. Windseeker had taken much time out of the leaders between Violet Hill and Stenhouse.

2200, it was

Wizard

closely

quarters

awaiting

runners. From

this point on,

tactics play a

lesser part and

it really comes

running ability.

A rocky

down to boat

speed or

terraced

outcrop is

normally used

for landing on

the south side

of Lamma. But

this year things

were different.

The water was

not flat. Instead, wave after

wave washing up the rocky

terraces had support crews

required additional support,

dinghies and runners through

launching and controlling

The conditions indeed

retreating to escape the

breaking surf.

Also in amongst the lead pack by now was lain Macleod's Zuma, one of two cats in Div C, which was revelling in the reaching conditions.

The anticipated spinnaker run down to Shek Kwu Chau did not materialise with the northerly, but with boats recording 8 knots and more, who was bothered? This year was going to be a fast race.

Once across the shipping channel, the renowned local influence of Lantau Island came into effect . . . a nightmare for several boats and the end of the race for some.

approaching Cheung Sha beach, the wind funnelling down through the gap between Sunset and Lantau Peaks had boats reaching back and forth several times attempting to kill speed and get to the desired drop-off point. Tipsy Free and Kam Loong both reported over 30 knots of wind. Tipsy aborted a number of attempts at launching its dinghy before succeeding, while Kam Loong's Jack Mallee and crew reluctantly agreed that the

The crew of Zuma tried desperately to position the boat for the landing but found controlling the cat in the wild conditions

conditions were too risky,

and decided to retire.

particularly for the shore party

difficult. They, too, retired as did Bits & Pieces and Sita.

the crews on board over night at Cheung Sha, preparing for the final leg to the finish, air temperature had dropped to 6°C. For the shore parties, the additional discomfort of being buffeted by gusts of wind and squalls of rain

made the ascent more of an epic than ever before.

Said one runner, "Rain



planned Himalayan summit."

7845

Several boats had arrived and were circling before first boat Wizard had retrieved its runners. The blast out of Cheung Sha was wild. Then it was Sod's Law — most were caught in a hole (some to a greater degree than others) between the shipping channel and Shek Kwu Cha. This had to happen after such good winds throughout.

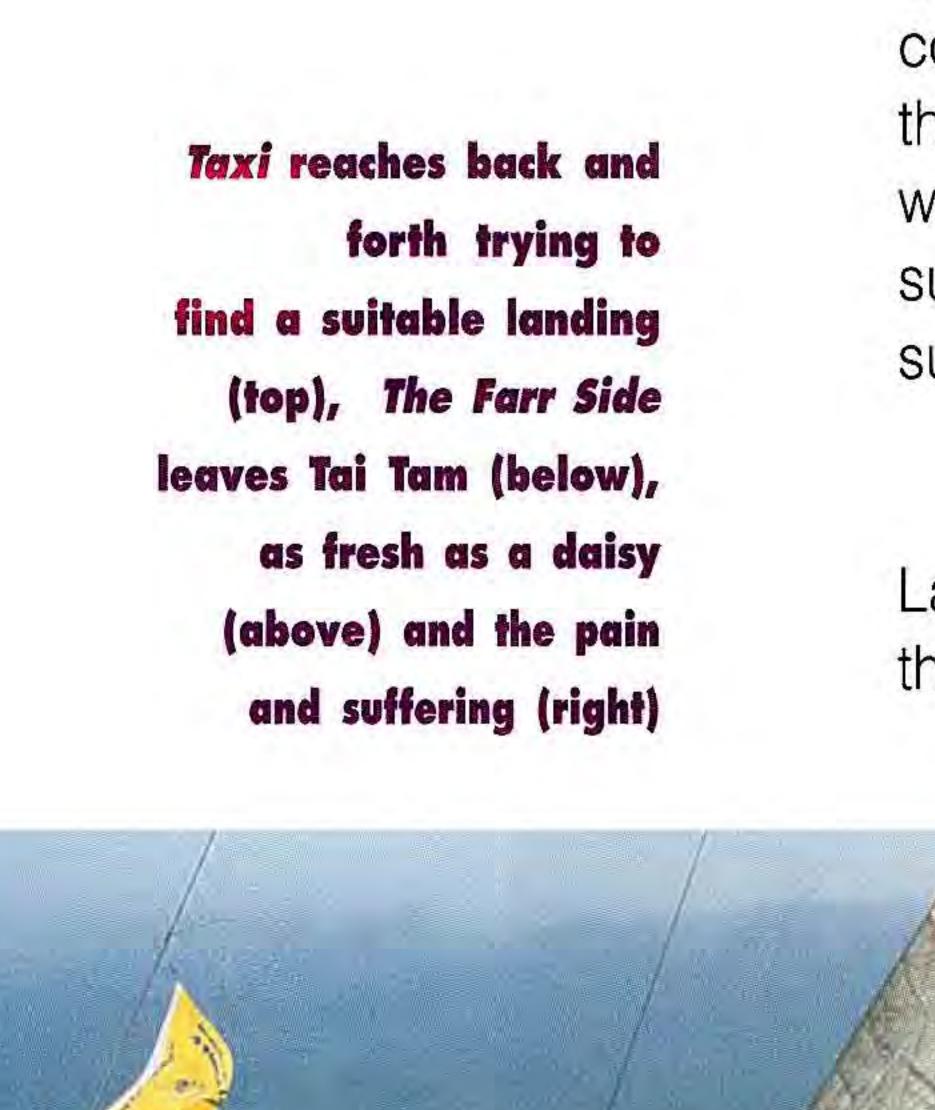
But eventually the old northerly picked up lifting boats up past Cheung Chau Rock on port tack and then on to the finish at Shek Kok Tsui. Wizard claimed line honours in Div A,

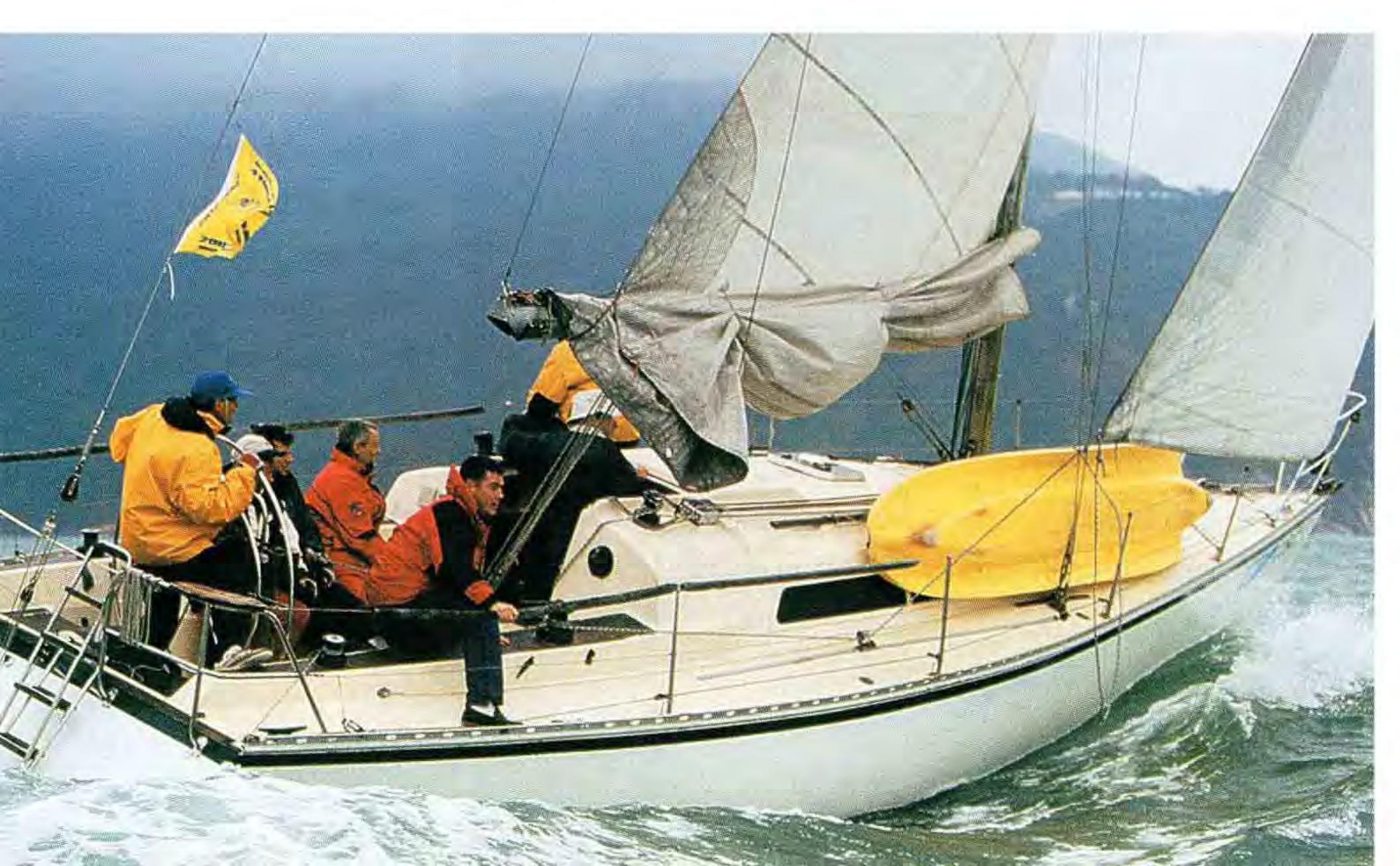
finishing at 0508, with Windseeker following at 0624, having been only — continued

Determined campaigner

Emily Chan

and Rhapsody (top) and Mark Sheldon, ATE, man-handles his inflatable ashore at Cheung Sha (left)





30 minutes behind on leaving Lantau.

Meanwhile, Div B boats were completing Violet Hill and on their way to Lamma. Div B boats race over a shorter course, which includes Po Toi Peak after Ma On Shan. And instead of Lantau Peak after Stenhouse, they head straight to the finish. Two out of three boats were still in the running at this stage (Ariki having retired).

Both *Rhapsody* and Adil Chaudhry's Cheoy Lee 33 (no name) have very similar PN numbers. But the recently refurbished Cheoy Lee lost a lot of time with rigging problems and a torn jib on the way to Sai Kung. And what with a blown spinnaker on the way down, Rhapsody had pulled out a big lead by Violet Hill.

Sadly, only *Rhapsody* made it to the finish. Said Chaudhry, "We arrived at the drop off on Lamma, all still very much up to it. But some of us had commitments and so we decided to pull out. But I'll definitely be back next year".

The provisional results showed Windseeker 1st overall

on HKPN in Div A and this is how they remained until the prizegiving. So it was a very disappointed Windseeker crew who found they had dropped

to 2nd overall on account of a 15-minute penalty imposed for a scrutineering infringement on Violet Hill. Wizard was the overall winner then, in Div A. Rhapsody won Div B, Chan's

second win since first entering the event in 2001. ATE, a regular entry since 2002, won multihull Div C.

Taxi was last to finish, carrying on until 1700. Skipper Dennis Chin and crew won the 'Spirit of the Race' award for dogged determination.

This year's Four Peaks saw weather and sea conditions which were particularly testing — in contrast to last year reaching the 2000 time limit, due to windless conditions from Port Shelter on. But this is what the race is all about. It's always unpredictable.

Last year showed just how important it was to

have kayaking strength to cover those long distances in the drop zones, when the wind fails. This year it was dinghy/kayakthe Four Peaks is a challenging multi-skill event.

responsible and that further outrages are inevitable.

new finish point in 2001, so making Violet Hill an intermediate peak, added a significant tactical challenge. Changes to the race instructions are

FERRY FIRE, OR MARITIME TERRORISM? The Philippines has had

February, yet another catstrophe saw the 10,500-tonne, 15-year-old

passengers on board, catch fire and sink off Corregidor Island, shortly

after it had left Manila. Some survivors said that an explosion preceded

The Philippine Coast Guard's Tenix search and rescue ships

turned up to try and douse the flames.

Furthermore, merchant vessels also

Fortune Express, being credited with rescuing

there a substantial response to the incident,

but the stricken ferry appears to have been

liferafts. Things, therefore, could certainly

have been very much worse. Ten bodies were

well equipped with modern, serviceable

some 600 survivors. Fortunately, not only was

attended the scene in numbers, with one,

Davao Del Norte, Edsa 2 and Romblon, as well as the Philippine Navy

(PN) patrol ship Artemio Ricarte (formerly HMS Starling), and a

the notorious Abu Sayyaf. The Islamic group was quick to claim

has officially downplayed the possibility of a terrorist attack.

responsibility for the ferry sinking, saying that one of its members

(Arnalfo Alvarado) had detonated a bomb on board. Superferry 14's

owners, WG&A, confirmed that such a passenger had boarded their

ship. Confusingly, the company's confirmation was later denied by a

activities have been showing an increasingly maritime focus, were

Coast Guard spokesman, while President Gloria Arroyo's administration

It is very likely that the publicity-hungry Abu Sayyaf, whose

more than its share of sea disasters. But again, on the 27th of

Japanese-built inter-island ferry Superferry 14, with about 900

ongoing and most competitors welcomed this year's adjustments. Many were minor.

Last year's removal of rowing, as a permitted means of would love it.

propelling the yacht in the drop zones, was lamented by some. But the re-introduction of other means to propel the yacht must be welcomed, as must the requirements for shore parties to carry mobile phones.

The debate about further course changes is likely to continue. The safety on Cheung Sha beach is of continuing concern and surely the sponsors would appreciate a daylight finish in order to generate more media interest.

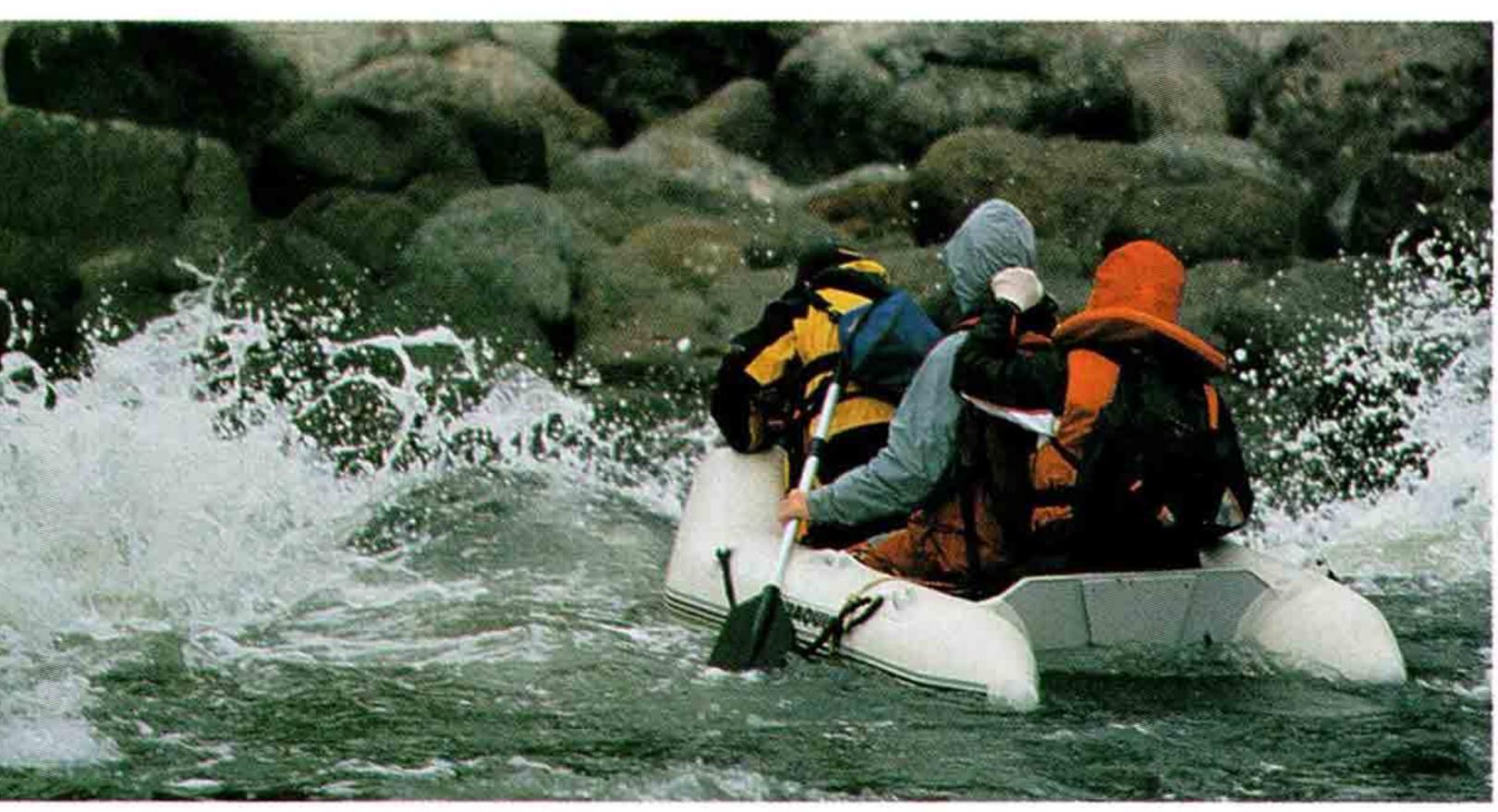
How about a final landing on Hong Kong Island and a dash to a finish line at the Aberdeen Boat Club? The runners, families, friends, press

number of smaller PN vessels, responded to the fire. Also, a newlyconverted Philippine Air Force UH1 rescue and firefighting chopper

later recovered from the sea, though, and more than 100 people remain missing. The sinking coincided with the conviction of two kidnappers of

the fire.

Changing the course and adding a



handling experience in rough water (above) during the shore transfers which tested crews to their limits. Each year is different. Having skilled sailors or top runners is not enough —

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