



continued from previous page — and the start of the Aberdeen Boat Club's Four Peaks Race, in its 23rd year with new principal sponsor, Aedas. A strong winter monsoon brought dry, bright and windy conditions and the only concern (for the runners) was the drop in temperatures below 5 degrees on the hills overnight.

With winds topping Force 5-6

expected, race officer Arnold Lunty had no hesitation in selecting the long course, and despatched a varied fleet of 15 boats, including Division A classes (10) for IRC, HKPN and Multihulls, as well as Division B (5), racing over a shorter three peaks course. Returning

for their second year, the Hong Kong Island Paddle Club also entered men's and women's outrigger teams to paddle *Malanai* and *Ko'olau* around a shortened Div B course.

A tight start forced boats out to both sides of the initial beat, but last year's winner, Wizard (IMX-38), led Walawala (Beneteau First 44.7) around the windward mark and off towards Fury Rocks. Chased by Kam Loong (Beneteau First 40.7), these three were favoured to contest line honours.

As expected, when clear of Hong Kong Island, the northeasterly Force 4 backed and freshened, providing an exhilarating beat for the

turn northwards to the first drop-off at Sai Kung. The smaller boats suffered though, many carrying kayaks on deck, whilst punching into short seas that had built over the 30nm fetch from Daya Bay.

Winning tactics are jealously guarded in this race. And rightly so — the rules allow a huge choice of where and how to transfer runners ashore within the four dropping zones. All under sail or paddle, mind — no motoring here! Lantau is the only peak where all boats are forced onto the same patch of beach, purely for want of alternatives.

The first peak, Ma On Shan (702m), is accessed through Port Shelter, which often traps the unwary as local winds die at sunset. Not a problem this time, though. *Walawala* dropped first at the public steps in Sai Kung at 1357, chased by *Wizard* just 5 minutes later and

another 8
minutes
behind that.
All Div A boats
had runners
ashore by
1450, Div B
by 1645—
this was
going to be a
quick race!

Wizard's

runners, Cosmo Richards and Andy Naylor, were first to the top, setting a cracking pace and a record time — continued on page 24



Continued from page 22— of 1:28:30 boat-to-boat. However, only 29 minutes behind at the peak, Taranis (J-24 OD) had

Paciding post Shok O

squeezed 1st place there on corrected time, with everything to play for.

Leaving Sai Kung, spinnakers flew in a colourful chase to the Ninepins, before jibing at sunset towards Waglan, then a

gusty reach to the drop-zone for Violet Hill (433m). Times had stretched somewhat by the second peak, with *Wizard* now outright 1st at 1856, but only 14 minutes ahead of *Kam Loong* in real time.



Somewhat later, *Rhapsody* (Sonata 8) peaked at 2222 (as the Div A leaders were approaching Lantau), managing to extend its lead in Div B to over an hour ahead of *Little Sunshine* (Maxi 77) before the Div B fleet split off, on

course to their third and last peak — Mount Stenhouse (353m) on Lamma Island.

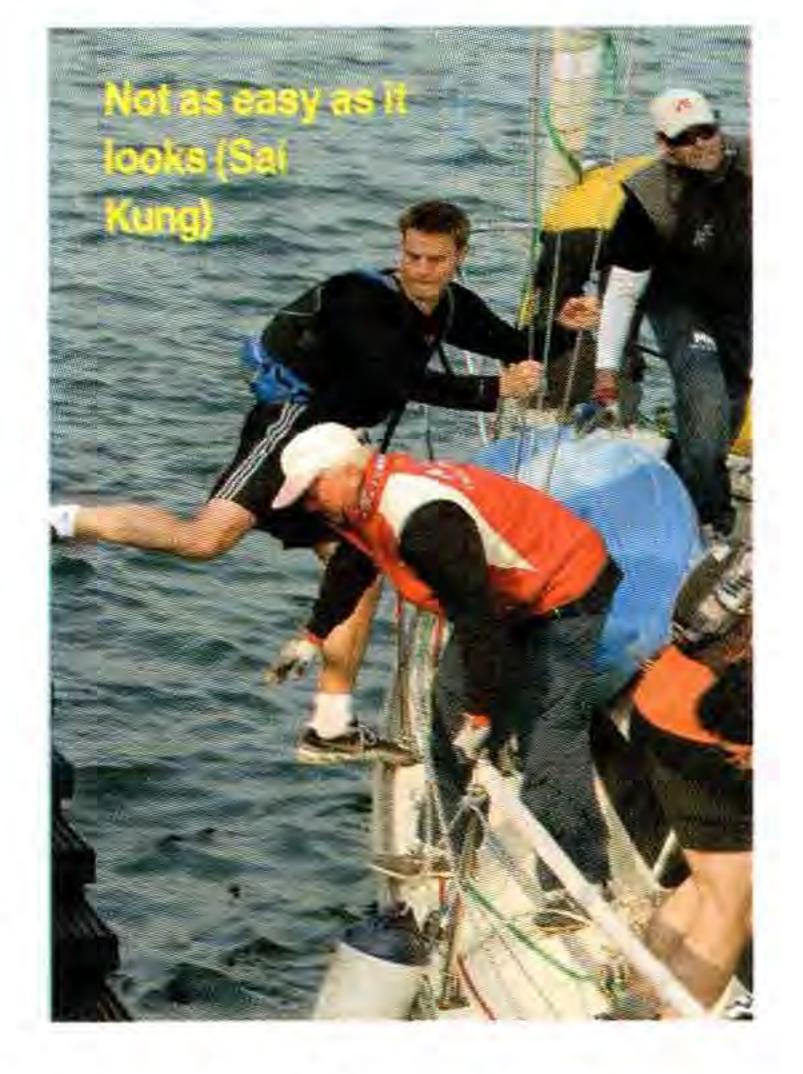
The paddlers, meanwhile, were not far behind. Outrigger canoeing in the Four Peaks Race presents unusual challenges. Typically, paddlers switch every 20 to 30 minutes in a long distance race. In one smooth transaction, three of the six paddlers roll over the side, while three others climb in from the water — ideally, without

losing a stroke. But with air temperatures around 11 degrees, no-one seemed interested in getting wet, water sport or not. So changes were co-ordinated via a dinghy, with paddlers clambering over each other whilst trying to avoid flipping the outrigger. Not a process that could be executed in a busy shipping channel, thus demanding an exhausting 45-minute paddle for a single crew between Repulse Bay and Lamma.

Long-distance races are often won or lost in the dark. The long reach for Div A, around Lamma to the Soko Islands was no exception, with some boats foregoing a demanding tight spinnaker reach that in daylight, with fresh crew, would have been a no-brainer. This was

capped by the final beat northwards to Lantau Island, with powerful bullets slamming into the boats as they closed Cheung Sha Beach.

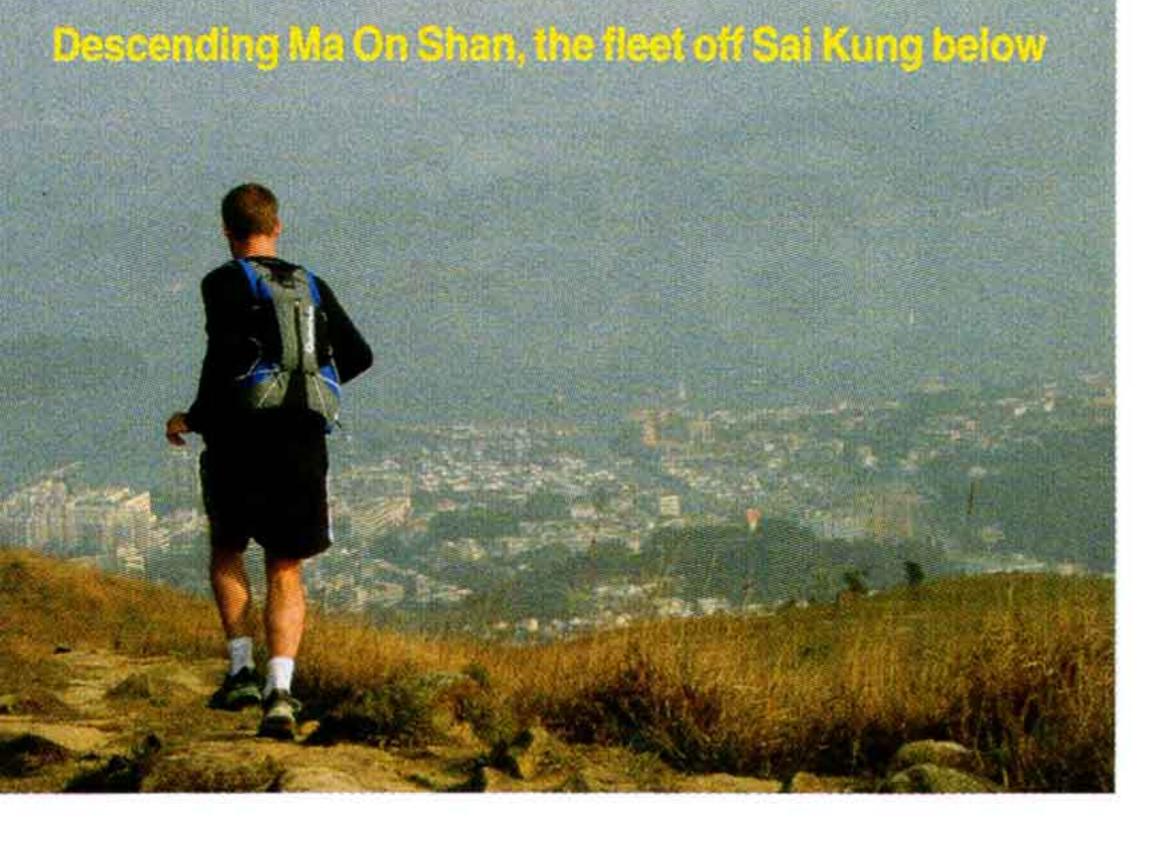
Wizard was forced to drop its runners well off the beach just



before 2300, barely managing to keep boatspeed under control, flying only a well-reefed main. Anchoring in the shallows then proved the safest way to recover the runners after another record run of 1:25:39 by Andy Naylor and Ben Blain.

Three hours later, in similar conditions, *Taranis* had no option but to retire, unable to land its runners and having ripped the bottom out of its dinghy in the attempt. *The Farr Side* (Farr 38) made huge gains on this third leg, overtaking *Walawala* for 3rd place at Lantau Peak on corrected time, a position held to the finish.

— continued on page 104



Continued from page 24— Dogwatch blues began to set in, even aboard the leading boats as they beat up to Cheung Chau rock (disguised by a poorly lit barge, moored alongside) then reached into the lee of Lamma for their final drop-

off. Sail-changes and weight-shifting become more of an 'ask' in the middle of the night, after 15 hours of hard racing. It was easy to forget that the fleet was now about to top the final peak well ahead of any previous race, and 10 hours or more ahead of their 2006 times!

But Stenhouse took its toll with the runners from *In Moderation* and Sawadee getting lost (in the elephant grass) and taking several hours to get back to their boats. Then, back in the wind again, tired crews had to endure a hammering from yet more gusts as they recrossed the Lamma Channel to finish off Middle Island.

Wizard again took line honours at 0433, setting a new race record (particularly over the longer course set in recent years) and taking 1st place under IRC and overall HKPN, with Kam Loong finishing a close 2nd. Tardis finished first in the HKPN class, and Rhapsody won convincing line honours as well as 1st place in Div B.

And the paddlers? Well, *Malanai* finished its short course at 2312, beating Ko'olau over the line by only 2 hours and 22 minutes. Acknowledgement of this and the many other achievements during the race were made on Friday, the 2nd of March, at the ABC by race committee chairman, Barry Hill (the surname is pure coincidence).

A Wizard perspective — by skipper, Jim Fernie

The ABC Four Peaks Race must be the best all-round sailing event on the Hong Kong racing calendar. No other event tests such a wide variety of sailing skills and techniques, day and night, in conditions ranging from fog-filled drifters to frigid winter gales.

In many ways, grand-prix style yacht-racing has evolved into a specialised, almost purist, test of beating and running which many sailors find boring. Not because it lacks technical challenge, but cans racing can prove sterile and repetitive. Circuit after circuit . . . mind-numbing. Give me a tortuous islands course any day.

There are other testing offshore races, of course: the San Fernando Race, South China Sea Race,

Hainan and Vietnam races. But they often end up being single-tack, multi-day tests of endurance, more than anything else.

The Four Peaks Race, on the other hand, demands competence across the board. Many liken its challenges to a four-legged stool: remove any one of the metaphorical 'legs' — preparation, tactics, sailing or running — and your performance is likely to be very shaky. Lose two legs, and you're in for a tumble.

Wizard certainly benefited from a team of very capable runners this year, with winning times on Ma On Shan and Lantau Peak, but that's not all of it. Where and how the runners are landed and collected within the various drop-zones is equally important. Our boat-boat running

time for all four peaks totalled a very creditable 5 hours 39 minutes, our best ever, but only 22 minutes faster than 2nd-placed Kam Loong.

Out on the water is where this race is won or lost — not surprisingly, given the 100+ nm course, which wends its way from one end of Hong Kong to the other, through a variety of wind and tidal conditions. Clear

memories of the tight beat, chasing Walawala up to Sai Kung, the exhilarating fine spinnaker reach past Wei Ling Ding in the dark, or dropping off our shore party, then anchoring in 30 knot bullets at Cheung Sha beach will all endure, but it's so very different every year.

One aspect beats all . . . this is a team sport, and very much a team race. Without every one of our crew's skills and abilities, experience and expertise (coupled with

that dash of bloody-minded concentration when fatigue or discomfort threaten to distract) we could not have turned out this winning performance. That is, without doubt, the most satisfying aspect of skippering 'Team Wizard' to 1st place.

If any of this piques your interest, why not put together a team of your own for next year? The Four Peaks Race is a challenging but immensely rewarding event for all the crew, and one that serious sailors in Hong Kong should attempt at least once.

Wizard's crew: Jim Fernie, Steve Turner, Paul Hetherington, Alain Bedard (Stenhouse), Ross Dawson (Stenhouse), Cosmo Richards (Ma On Shan & Violet), Ben Blain (Lantau), Andy Naylor (Ma On Shan & Lantau) and Matt McLaughlin (Violet)

