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Parable of the pedalo

But do not rush off to follow it

It makes last year's circumnavigation of the earth in a balloon by the British-Swiss team look "easy-peasy". After all, that only took 20 days. Robbie Knieval, Evel Knieval's son, who last year became the first person to jump the Grand Canyon on a motorbike, would probably concede his challenge was easier. For it is seven years since two British adventurers left Greenwich to pedal their way round the world — by boat and bike. They began in July, 1994, bicycling to Rye before beginning an epic 4,900 mile pedalo journey across the Atlantic. It was part of the "pedal for the planet" programme, endorsed by Unesco. Part of its purpose was to remind people of the possibility of human power — and part to inspire young people to "follow their dreams". Jason Lewis, 32, from Bridport, Dorset, has now completed the first east-west crossing of the Atlantic and the first Pacific crossing, all 9,000 miles, by pedal boat. Yesterday, he talked to the press about shark attacks, sea pirates and the

problem of the tides, which sometimes exceed the pull and power of even experienced boat pedallers. Now he is planning to bike — and roller blade — across Australia. What could be more romantic?

Before the young rush off in an armada of pedalos from Britain's western ports, we should perhaps remind readers of what Jason's first partner, Steve Smith, told us last year. He lasted five years but bailed out in Hawaii. The first problem was finance — "schmoozing existing sponsors and finding new ones". The men were forced to work in various boatyards to raise cash. Then there's the pedalling — almost permanent pedalling "like a hamster in its cage" with a "rat-hole of a bed" and living space only 10ft long. But worst of all, was the failure to achieve the simplicity sought: "The cost of having this very, very ambitious scheme means that you really don't have time to get back to simplicity." That's the parable of the pedalo in the Pacific.