

THE TIMES SATURDAY AUGUST 19 2000

# Australians hail pedal-powered Pom with beer

By Tim Reid

FOR all their anti-British bluster, the Australians love a mad Pom. Yesterday Jason Lewis, 32, an adventurer from Dorset, was showered with adulation and beer cans as he completed an extraordinary and record-breaking 7,000-mile trans-Pacific crossing in a tiny pedal boat.

As he pedalled the 26ft *Moksha* into Port Douglas, Queensland — completing the fifth leg of his 35,000-mile human-powered circumnavigation — hundreds of Australians took to the water in a flotilla of boats, blaring horns and screaming "Good on yer mate" as they conferred on him the status of honorary cobbler.

They have seen nothing yet. Now he plans to rollerskate several thousand miles to Darwin.

Mr Lewis began his epic voyage from Greenwich more than six years ago. He had already pedalled the craft across the English Channel, cycled across Europe, pedalled across the 4,500-mile Atlantic, rollerskated across America and cycled through Central America before his Pacific voyage began last year. He is the first person to cross the Pacific using pedal-power.

"They gave us a fantastic welcome," Mr Lewis told *The Times* last night. "Beer has featured very highly. The first thing they thrust in my hand was a cold one. Loads of people lobbed beers at the boat

as we came in, waving, shouting and honking horns. They love the pioneering spirit."

Mr Lewis, who began his Pedal for the Planet voyage in May 1994, has so far covered more than 20,000 miles, more than 10,000 by sea. He started out with a friend, Steve Smith, but pedalled the 2,400 miles from Hawaii to the island of Tarawa, in Kiribati in the central Pacific, solo.

He was joined by the boat's builder, Chris Tipper, for the 1,200-mile leg from Tarawa to the Solomon Islands, but pedalled all but 11 miles of the last 1,200-mile Pacific leg on his own.

The boat, with a cabin no bigger than the inside of a small wardrobe, has a satellite telephone, a global positioning system and a computer, which can send and receive e-mail, all powered by solar panels.

Fresh water is delivered via an electric desalinator and meals consist of dehydrated vegetables and powder, 500lb of which are loaded on board before each leg.

More than three million schoolchildren, mostly from America, have accessed the expedition's website in the past two years.

The trip has had some frightening and bizarre moments. Rollerskating in Colorado, Mr Lewis broke both his legs when he was hit by a car driven by an 82-year-old man just about to have a cataract operation. He was laid up for nine months.

Halfway across the Atlantic,

the boat was flipped over by a surfacing whale during the night. A few days later, again in the middle of the night, a huge trawler that could not see the pedal boat missed its bow by 50ft.

"It just kept on coming and there was nothing we could do about it," Mr Lewis said. "That was very, very scary."

The boat was also rolled over by a 30ft wave during an Atlantic storm.

"Steve was thrown out," Mr Lewis said. "When it righted itself I thought I had lost him. But his shoe had got caught in the desalinator tubing, which saved him. He was being dragged along 15ft behind the boat as it surfed along this giant wave."

Since he first planned the trip seven years ago, Mr Lewis has managed to raise nearly £250,000 by selling T-shirts, giving slide shows to rotary and yacht clubs around the world and talks to hundreds of schools.

The names of more than 2,500 individual sponsors, who each gave about £2,000, adorn the side of the boat. But he says he is now facing bankruptcy.

"I really hope I can raise some money in Australia," Mr Lewis, who suffers festering sores on his buttocks, legs and feet, said. "Otherwise I am fearful that the journey back to Britain will fail."

Mr Lewis has no girlfriend but has managed the odd romantic fling over the past six years.

His father, Lieutenant-Colonel Sebert Lewis, said last night: "I think like all parents we have watched with open mouths at what our offspring do from time to time. We are very proud of him, particularly the following he has among schoolchildren."

I interviewed Mr Lewis six years ago on the day before he left Greenwich. After pedalling the boat on a canal in North London, I wished him luck but thought privately that he would have trouble crossing the Serpentine, let alone the world's greatest oceans. How wrong I was.



Jason Lewis pedalling his way into Port Douglas in his boat yesterday. He now plans to rollerskate to Darwin

## THE ROUTE BY LAND AND SEA

