

Regional News

'Round the world pedal pushers

Brits take a stiff upper lip after boat sinks at San Simeon

By Lee Sutter
The Cambrian

Two Englishmen walked dejectedly back from the end of the pier here, after taking a look at their cap-sized pedal boat.

"It's a sorry sight," said Stuart Smith, who had driven down from Monterey after the Moksha and crew hit rough seas and were rescued Dec. 3 by the Coast Guard.

Except the Coast Guard tied the boat on a buoy, and the 26-foot-long pedal-powered boat couldn't handle the rough waves. It went under Dec. 5.

It had a chance of withstanding the wild seas, according to Smith. "Both ends have got ballast because they've got air in them," he said, but he fears the hatch wasn't closed properly when they left it tied up.

John Walker had been aboard with Casey Dunn for the 10-day journey from Monterey, the first leg of a California- to-Hawaii trip for the "Pedal for the Planet" expedition.

"We needed two more days of good weather to get far enough out," Walker said.

The boat, with other pedalers, had already made the 111-day trip from Portugal to Miami, Fla.

Walker, from Liverpool, had only recently come aboard as crew.

"I was working with the British Navy in Monterey when I got to know these guys," he said.

"These guys" included Dunn and Smith, who are just a part of the expedition. Smith's son, Steven Smith, and Jason Lewis bicycled through France, Spain and Portugal before pedaling off in the boat for the Atlantic crossing. Smith and his girlfriend then bicycled across the southern United States to San Francisco, while Lewis rolled a more northerly route on his in-line skates, before bicycling through South America to Peru.

The expedition is totally dependent on public support, since the participants wanted to avoid corporate assistance, they say.

"We're sponsored by the people," said Stuart Smith, who has been involved with the expedition from the outset. Although Steven is his son, he extends the kinship to the other men. "They're all my boys, really," he said, before heading for his old



Photo by Kathe Tanner

The Moksha*Before it sank at San Simeon*

Mercury. He had driven down from Monterey to see what could be done with the Moksha, which is Sanskrit for liberation.

A slip was available at Leffingwell Landing, but as of Dec. 5 there was no way to get the boat there. Fishing boats are not even going out of San Simeon Landing this time of year.

They had considered hiring a crane to pull the pedal boat onto the San Simeon Pier, but it was feared the pier couldn't take the weight of the boat, although it's only 4.5 feet wide, said Walker.

Although their mobility is man-powered, their communication is totally up to date, with lap-top computers and a web-site.

At one time during emergency

evacuations at sea, the rule of thumb was women and children first. That's changed.

"It's computers first," said Walker with a laugh. They considered not putting the computers aboard for this leg of the trip, but they knew that thousands of children have been following their journey through the web, and they didn't want to let them down, according to Walker.

"It's such an integral part of it now," Walker said of the web-site, which also includes an e-mail address. "Besides that, our families would've been worried sick, as well."

The Pedal for the Planet expedition can be reached though www.pedalplanet.net or by calling (800) 943-0114.

The Moksha, although small, contains enough space for the two-man crew to be comfortable. "There's no decks," Smith had explained, "It's like an ocean-going kayak."

There is room below, although not much. "It's sitting room only," said Walker, but it is equipped for cooking.

"We've got about 90 days of rations on board," he said, noting the food, all dehydrated, just needs water.