

TALLAHASSEEAN

Your Weekly Community Newspaper

25 ¢

Inspiring Brits Pedal Across The Atlantic

By Karen Groves

This has nothing to do with the British Olympians in town, although the two young men in question have already set world records while attempting to complete the first around-the-world expedition of its kind.

Englanders Steve Smith, 28, and Jason Lewis, 27, two enterprising young men, have just completed the first leg of a trip that borders on being mythical. Jason was in Tallahassee last week to talk about his adventures and to rustle up more sponsors.

The two have just completed an 111-day, 4,500-mile journey across the Atlantic Ocean while crammed into what looks to the amateur like an over-sized, and covered skulling boat.

But this is not just any boat. It is not powered by oars, paddles, engines or sails. Here, the quadriceps, hamstrings and gluteus maximus come into play because the boat is run by pedal power alone.

That's right, Smith and Lewis have literally pedaled across the Atlantic. And the Pacific continues to beckon because the two adventurers have completed only a quarter of their journey.

While you may think this is some crazy stunt, the adventure is actually a very organized expedition called *Pedal For The Planet*, which Smith and Lewis embarked upon July 12, 1994 from Greenwich, England.

Their plan is to circumnavigate the world using human power alone, returning to England sometime in 1998. To get across land, Smith and Lewis switch to bicycles and in-line skates.

"Why?" you may ask.
"Boredom," they'd reply.

Englishman Jason Lewis was in Tallahassee last week to talk about his adventures.

Life Is Short

When you get down to the nitty-gritty, the impetus for

See Atlantic On Page 6

ATLANTIC

From Page 1

Two Brits Pedal The Atlantic

The only other near-capsize occurred one morning at 3 a.m. when a whale broke the surface directly beneath the boat. "That was the scariest moment," Lewis said. "It was dark and we didn't know if it was a shark, submarine or what. I saw my life spinning out of my hands."

this expedition was a case of boredom, but also disillusionment. *Pedal For the Planet* is the brain-child of two former college buddies who one day sat down to commiserate about their successful, yet mundane lives.

After graduating from London University, Smith and Lewis followed their own paths. While Lewis worked his way through the music world, Smith focused on his career as an environmental researcher. But where did all the excitement go? Both were feeling unfulfilled.

So, despite lots of success and lots of money, the two simply jettisoned their careers and turned their attention to crossing international borders.

"We decided to make a break before it was too late -- get out of the rut we were in," said Lewis, who visited Tallahassee for several days last week. "The whole thing was prompted by the realization that life is short. We were making lots of money but neither of us were satisfying some kind of inner desire."

A Real Education

But *Pedal for the Planet* is much more than just sating the craving for adventure. The two are using the opportunity to influence the world youth at the same time. Smith and Lewis have dedicated themselves to visiting schools in each of the 18 countries they pass through. The aim of the school visits is to inspire, enrich and empower the minds of young people by encouraging them to have faith in themselves.

"That is the point of our message," said Lewis. "People told us that we couldn't do this, and they disapproved. But we take that as a compliment. We want people to react rather than be indifferent. We have great power as individuals if we have faith."

While a disaster for the Portuguese, Moksha was undamaged and two set out on the epic voyage across the Atlantic.

As Smith and Lewis moved Moksha out to sea, "reality came crashing down on us," Lewis said. "After all that planning, we finally had to walk the talk."

Taking turns pedaling and working two hour shifts during the day, and four hour shifts at night, the two settled in as best they could for four months of pedaling at sea. Sleep deprivation became a problem because neither of them were able to sleep for more than three hours at a time.

Two Years Of Planning

The expedition took over two years of planning and boat building before the two were ready to leave England. The wooden boat was designed and built by two of Smith and Lewis' college friends. It has a sliding cover to keep out bad weather, uses the pedal mechanism from Lewis' old bicycle, and

more importantly, is designed to right itself if flipped over.

Once they were ready, Smith and Lewis set off on bicycles from the Greenwich Meridian Line, cycling to the south coast of England where they picked up their boat and prepared to pedal across the English Channel to France.

"The most difficult thing was actually getting away from London," says Lewis. "You know, getting out of the rut in the first place, but then cutting financial and relationship ties. It was a real struggle to get this thing going, but once we did, the pedaling was pretty easy."

Or was it? Lewis admitted he wasn't as physically fit for the journey as he could have been. "I hadn't sat on a bike since I was 16," he remarked. "The idea was that we would get fit as we went and it was a nightmare for the first few days. But we felt it was more important to have a positive attitude."

And with a positive attitude, he believes anyone could do what he and Smith have done. "One has a perception that this would be very difficult," he said. "But the human mind is incredibly adaptable."

Tour De Smith & Lewis

Once in France, Smith and Lewis cycled six weeks through France, Spain and Portugal, finally arriving at Lagos on the Portuguese Algarve, where they were to catch up with their boat on the coast.

Lewis recalled how several Portuguese men who had just invested in a brand new truck, offered to help lower the boat, named Moksha, into the water. "This truck was their pride and joy," Lewis said. "It was brand new but what they hadn't figured out was that the boat was heavier than the truck. Well, they got the boat in the water but the truck went in right after it."

While a disaster for the Portuguese, Moksha was undamaged and two set out on the epic voyage across the Atlantic.

Reality Hits

As Smith and Lewis moved Moksha out to sea, "reality came crashing down on us," Lewis said. "After all that planning, we finally had to walk the talk."

Taking turns pedaling and working two hour shifts during the day, and four hour shifts at night, the two settled in as best they could for four months of pedaling at sea. Sleep deprivation became a problem because neither of them were able to sleep for more than three hours at a time.

The sleeping compartment also doubled as the garbage room which added to the unpleasantness. The two kept all their garbage on board until they could dispose of it properly on land. "It just didn't feel right throwing it overboard," Lewis said. "But it really stank."

Food was provided by five-year old military dried food rations, vitamin supplements and about 5,000 Mars Bars. The two had a small gas stove aboard to heat meals and make tea and hot chocolate. The food lasted for about 97-days, after which fish became a major part of their diet.

Communication with the outside world was virtually impossible except for 20-mile radius VHF radio. The two navigated using a hand-held navigational computer and a sexton, although Lewis admitted neither of them knew how to use the latter piece of equipment.

Day to Day Living

Being crammed into Moksha couldn't really be called living, Lewis said. It was more of an existence.

"The inside of the boat becomes your whole world and your entire perspective changes," Lewis said. With nothing to look at other than water, and without the interference and noise of 'normal' life, "making tea at 3 a.m. became a cosmic experience because you are so focused."

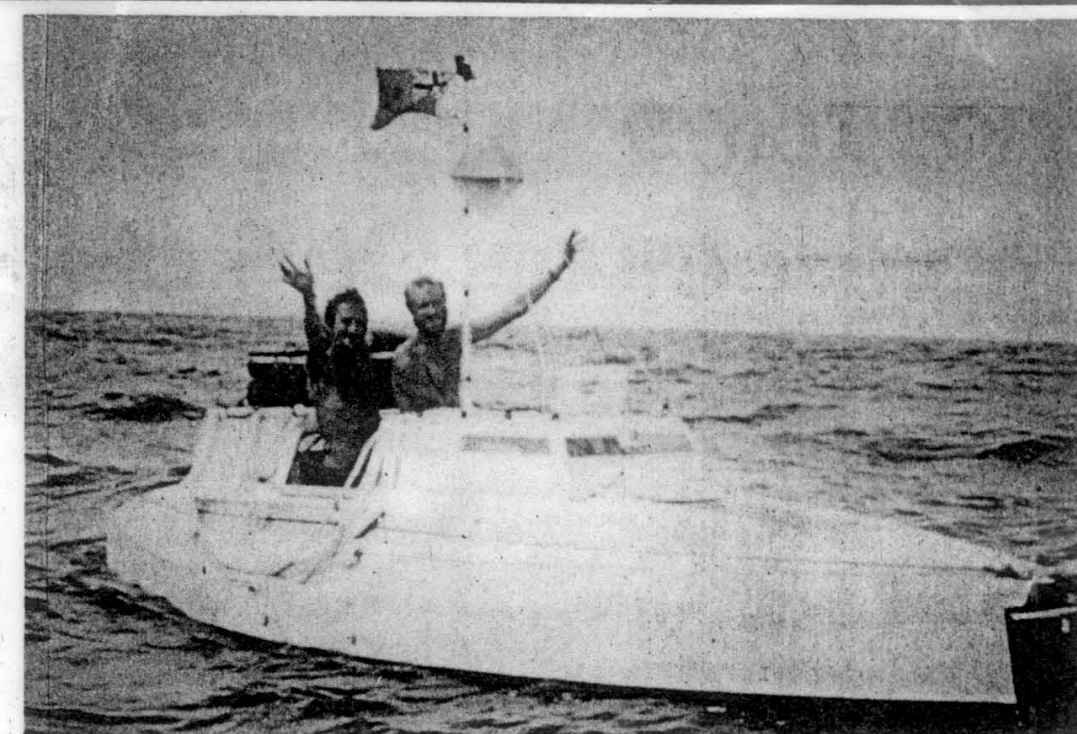
Smith wrote in a newsletter, "Jason chose to confine and focus himself on daily activities ... he found that our simple routine and isolation released time to thoroughly concentrate on doing each project well, whether it was cooking, writing, making repairs or just thinking."

Smith, however, spent much of his time focusing on navigation and weather. "Being focused on the present may avoid anxiety," he wrote, "but one cannot just 'be' for too long in a wooden box with dwindling food whilst floating on water three miles deep. My moods therefore, were closely related to the weather."

Playing With Fate

And Smith almost met his fate because of that weather. During particularly rough seas, Smith was washed overboard when a wave tipped Moksha over on its side. Because the boat can only go forward, "I thought he was gone," Lewis said. "But his shoe got caught in the rudder which saved his life because he was dragged along under the boat and was able to climb back on board."

The only other near-capsize occurred one morning at 3 a.m. when a whale broke the surface directly beneath the boat. "That was the scariest moment," Lewis said. "It was dark and we didn't know if it was a shark, submarine or what. I saw my life spinning out of my hands."



Jason, 27, and Steve, 28, wave happily to cameras as they approach Miami after 111-days crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a pedal-powered boat. They were escorted into Miami by the U.S. Coast Guard on February 17. Photos provided.

"We have great power as individuals if we have faith."

Since that scare however, the only other 'disaster' was the day a wave washed every last stitch of clothing they had overboard. For the last half of the journey, Smith and Lewis pedaled naked. "When we arrived in Miami we didn't have any clothes. (A member of the U.S.) Coast Guard had to give us his shorts," Lewis said.

Fortunately, the loss of clothes occurred after Christmas Day, when they were fortunate enough to come alongside the US Cable Ship Charles L. Brown.

"We were feeling pretty sorry for ourselves and were listening to Christmas Carols on the BBC," Lewis said. It was then that they noticed the AT&T cable ship and radioed over. They were invited on board and were treated to Christmas dinner. The skipper even allowed them to use the satellite phone to call home.

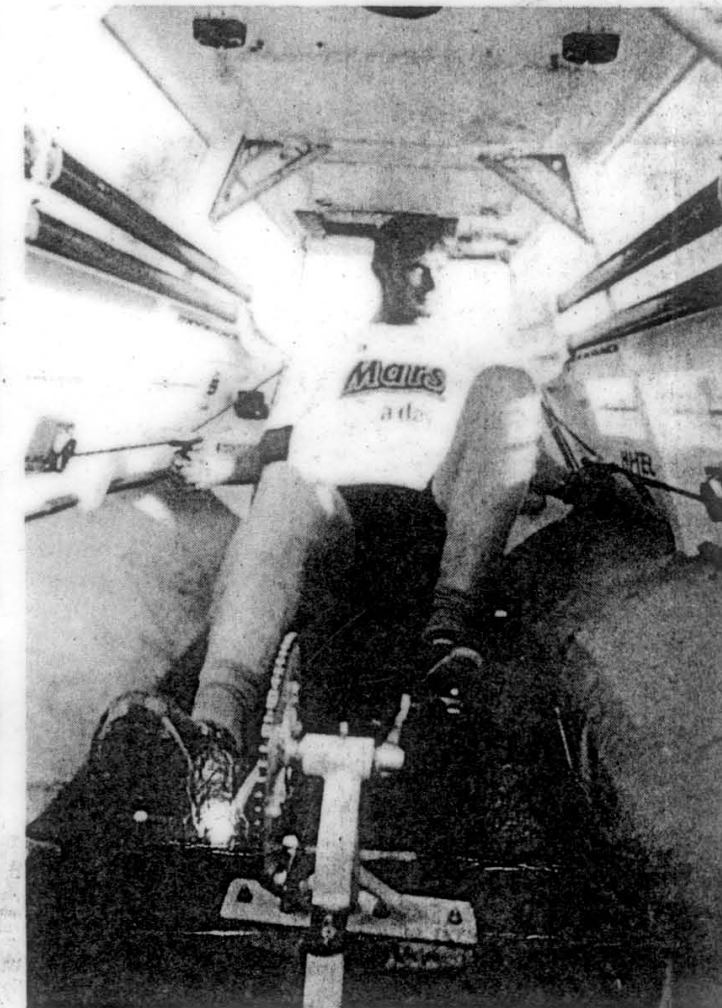
"It was a brief and unforgettable fairy-tale to share turkey dinner and wine with friendly faces on Christmas Day, 2,000 miles from land. We expected mutton granules and water," Smith later wrote.

U.S. Land At Last

After stopping briefly at Providenciales in the Turks and Caicos Islands, Smith and Lewis pedaled the last leg of their Atlantic journey towards Miami, arriving February 17. After a brief stopover there, they got back into the boat and traveled along the coast to Fort Lauderdale where Moksha is currently on display.

The two then parted company with Lewis skating to Tallahassee. With his sights set on San Francisco, Lewis skated out of Tallahassee July 22. Once in San Francisco, he will be reunited with Moksha and head across the Pacific Ocean, alone. "I'm really fascinated in that type of isolation on the individual," he said calmly.

Smith meanwhile, is cycling across country to Alaska where he will kayak across the



Smith takes his turn at pedaling in the cramped quarters of the boat. The pedals were taken from Lewis' old bicycle.



Demonstrating his musical background, Lewis takes a break from the monotony of sea-life.

Yukon and cycle down the 1998. Bearing Strait.

The two will meet in Hong Kong in 1997. From there they will cycle across Asia to Europe, and back to England in

A Learning Experience

For Lewis, the journey has

See Pedal On Page 7

PEDAL

From Page 6

The experience has changed Jason's perspective on life

changed his view of life. The motto for this extraordinary expedition is, "Our life is frittered away by detail... simplify, simplify." (Thoreau), and Lewis has taken that creed to heart. He plans to lead a simple life from now on.

"Today, I've got \$50 in my pocket and the clothes I'm standing up in. But I'm a happier man," he said. "This is a gamble that actually paid off."

Editor's Note: Smith and Lewis are in desperate need of more sponsors to help them complete the expedition. For \$20 you can have your name printed on the side of the boat, which also entitled you to a regular newsletter to keep you up-to-date on their progress. T-shirts are also available for \$20. For more information, their U.S. contact is Nancy Sanford, P.O. Box 801, St. Petersburg, Florida, 33731 (813) 822-4783.

Pedal for the Planet also has a home-page on the Internet. The address is [HTTP://WWW.TACIL.NET/PUBLIC/ORG/PEDAL/PEDALPLANET.HTM](http://WWW.TACIL.NET/PUBLIC/ORG/PEDAL/PEDALPLANET.HTM).

SOD

- ❖ Centipede or St. Augustine
- ❖ Locally grown
- ❖ Large or small quantities
- ❖ Farm fresh to the public
- ❖ Pick up or delivery

PANTHER CREEK