

LUCKY No. 13 TOP-TO-TOP POWERBOAT RECORD

THE Top to Top Race, from Douglas Head in the Isle of Man to the top of Blackpool Tower, took place for a fourth year on June 16–18. Distance in a straight line is 60 miles but the antics of some competitors means that this can extend—often unintentionally—to over 100 miles.

For 1973 there were 97 listed entries, the total being increased by a few spur-of-the-moment additions at the last minute. There are seven different classes and among the powerboats was entry No. 13, of Bryan Jardine's Duckhams-liveried Lancer Corniche, with its pair of beefy Chevrolet motors capable of thrusting it through the water at some 70 mph. Crewing with the owner and his son Michael was Duckhams man Ken Harber. Let him take up the story...

Our first run was actually made on good water—even though there was an Isle of Man report of a Force 8 gale in the offing—and within just 1 hr of leaving the clock control at the top of Blackpool Tower we had Douglas harbour in sight. A time of 1 hr 30 min looked possible.

At that moment the engines came to a sudden stop and, tracing the source of a smell of fuel, we found that a fractured feed pipe had allowed nearly 20 gallons of fuel to enter the engine compartment. A repair was impossible and, after all the flares had been fired without response, we were left to drift hopelessly for hours.

Eventually we were spotted by an inshore trawler and as he came alongside, we threw him our rope... nobody was going to claim our £6,000 boat for salvage, even if it meant drifting for a fortnight. So our berth was reached at midnight, after an

incredible 12 hours at sea, during only one of which we were under our own power. No food was on board, but both the whisky and rum bottles were emptied before we reached Blackpool's shore.

Early on the second day we learnt that a time of 2 hr 2 min had been recorded while we were making good the fuel line. Everything was set for a second run, but the foul sea conditions by then not only prevented our getting out but also washed the rival Voodoo Nylon boat which had made that good time into the pier, causing irreparable damage. As it was a Lancer Corniche with even bigger engines than ours, someone was going to be faced with a hefty bill!

Other boats were sunk or damaged by the rough water and it was decided to cross to the Isle of Man overnight and make a competitive run from there the following morning, the last day available.

Before we set off, a new all-time record had been set by an Island competitor, in 1 hr 56 min.

Off we went, full throttle, heads down, and with a determination that Churchill would have been proud of.

One-third of the distance was covered in 32 min. "Not bad," someone said. "Not bloody good enough," came the reply.

Two-thirds distance, with waves at least 4 ft high, took us up to 1 hr 12 min. The weather was worsening and then—horror of horrors!—there was a bad loss of power on one engine.

A quick inspection showed the starboard engine grossly overheating, further examination revealed a piece of timber jammed tightly between a damaged pro-

peller and the water in-take. Nothing for it but to cut both engines, get overboard and shift the timber. With as good a kick as it is possible to administer in water, the offending item was cleared.

Then back into the boat, full throttle and heads down again.

The damaged prop was losing us some 3–4 mph and the excitement of dealing with the obstruction had thrown us a little off course. But—to hell with the compass!—there was the Tower in sight.

Minutes were ticking away as it grew nearer and then, with the tide going out, the nose of the boat was driven into the sand, at 1 min 51 sec. Michael Jardine, our 17-year-old entry, leapt from the bows, disappeared momentarily under the water and was then away, up the steps, across the prom with the police holding up the traffic for him, and into the Tower.

At 1 hr 52½ min he was waiting for one of the Tower's two lifts to reach ground level. It arrived and, with a rapid exit at the top, Michael was clocking in with an all-time powerboat Top to Top record of 1 hr 54 min 42 sec.

The damaged prop precluded a further run and we had an agonising six hours to wait before we could be sure that no-one would beat our time.

Then at 11 p.m., with the record time confirmed, Michael was collecting a magnificent trophy and a cheque from Michael Barratt of BBC TV's 'Nationwide'.

The fastest crossing of all was by a Westland Gazelle helicopter, in 27 min, and one of the most adventurous was a 28 hr voyage in a suitably waterproofed 1968 Volkswagen Beetle.

Bryan Jardine of Poulton-le-Fylde beat the powerboat record for the 60-mile crossing from Douglas, Isle of Man, to Blackpool when he took part in the fourth Top to Top Race in June. Driving his Duckhams-liveried (and named) Lancer Corniche—with his 17-year-old son Michael as the nominated competitor—he clocked 1 hr 54 min 42 sec from the top of Douglas Head to the top of Blackpool Tower. Beating the existing record by almost 5 min, despite a heavy sea and a damaged propeller, the Jardine team won a trophy and £100.

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