

2014 was Rebel's 3rd venture round the SIPR. Lessons learned from each previous year shaped the boat, the crew and tactics. The constant from each race was the skipper and runners Colin Bishop and Tim Whittaker.

Each year, looking for better speed, saw Rebel stripped of more gear. 2014 saw all doors off, cabin table out, no steel cutlery and only 4 bowls. Everything else was either absolutely necessary or screwed on too well.

The crew had been re-vamped too. Joining in Oban were Andrew Miles and Simon Balmer, both veterans of the 3 Peaks race. In previous years, inexperience, sea sickness, and of course exhaustion prevented peak performance. The inclusion of veterans Balmer and Miles was probably critical to surviving the race.

Runners Bishop and Whittaker are just brilliant to have on board, humour, determination and camaraderie abounds.

Looking at the fleet in Oban in the sunshine it was immediately obvious that this year was probably going to be the most fiercely competed event that we'd certainly been involved in. As a small cruiser racer it was daunting to be faced with such an array of very expensive lethal hardware. Just one of those race machines could have bought 5 or 6 'Rebels'.

As race start approached the conditions necessitated a review on where the runners would meet the dinghy. Our foray along the shore didn't go unnoticed and shortly after 30 or so rubber dinghy's were strewn along the shore upwind from the jetty.

It's always good to have a target, and since winning was completely unrealistic we pitched ourselves against the J92's. Moby J was the specific target, she has a massively experienced skipper in Martin Pound and our runners knew their runners Perry and Barber. It was perhaps a highly optimistic target given that they had a faster boat, faster runners and a skipper with a ship load more experience but hey, tortoise and hare and all that.

It's always good to get the race underway after having had most of your waking thoughts and some of your nocturnal ones too filled with the anticipation. The beat up to Salen in the strong breeze was not to Rebel's liking. The bigger boats and those with sleek lead shoe's pounded past or

pulled away, leaving Rebel in 14th place and 5 minutes behind Moby J at Salen. So now it was up to the runners, and off they went heading into atrocious conditions up on the fell.

My heart sinks when it comes to anchoring at Salen (or Kelp City) but to our astonishment the Danforth held first time and we hunkered down. We figured that this year wasn't going to be fast so allowed for a 5 hour leg. We were in no way surprised that they weren't back even after 5 ½ hrs, particularly as Moby J was still meandering around, it wasn't unreasonable for Perry and Barber to take out another half an hour on our lads. However! Just a few minutes later the boys (sodden and somewhat shell shocked) appeared, and off we set in the dying breeze back down south. Their heroics and cool heads had pulled us up to 9th. As twilight approached the beast that is Warrior started to haul us in, although they did insist on sailing some weird and wonderful angles that meant the lead between us changed several times before they started to pull away. Rounding the SE corner of Mull we once again sheeted in to beat our way to the Sound of Luing. In the lighter airs we seemed to be moving ok and the stern lights ahead of us appeared to be getting closer, the reason for that became apparent as we closed on S o L, they were all parked up in the ferocious tide. What seemed like the whole fleet were now within spitting distance. The only problem was that we were now going backwards... So it was time to break out Billy big nuts... we rowed and clawed our way toward the shore. Once out of the grip of the tide we short tacked up the shore, often so close we could have passed a biscuit to any nocturnal walker on the rocks. It was paying off, we were passing the fleet! With just one more rock to pass that stuck into the S o L we would be clear.. the tension and excitement in the half light with a soundtrack of a gurgling tide was palpable. We stuck our nose out past the rock only for the bow to be swung round 40 degrees and immediately our progress was back in the direction we had just come. Four times we repeated the exercise with precisely the same result, on the fifth attempt we opted to try crossing the sound which led to some heart stopping moments as Dubh Sgeir looked to be swallowing us up. This wasn't a good move, and we slipped our way backwards trying to reverse the manoeuvre. In the end we had to do what everybody else did and hang around until boat speed overtook the slackening tide. Frustratingly this of course meant the faster boats slipped away earlier,

and the delay had given Moby J a chance to catch up. The beat to Craighouse (why did we seem to beat almost everywhere on this trip?) seemed interminable, Moby J shot past being sailed beautifully and left us for dead, although we did manage to overhaul Laura (another target yacht) to get a 3 minute lead on her going in to Craighouse, now in 8th place.

The runners didn't shine on the Paps, perhaps Ben More had taken too much of a toll or maybe it just wasn't their run and we left Craighouse bay in 12th place. Moby J an hour ahead looked to be uncatchable. Laura's runners had stormed it and she left over half an hour ahead as well but we were now a few minutes ahead of Warrior, though we knew we couldn't hold them off for long. Our hopes in improving our placing lay in reeling in Tangle o' the Isles and Highland Spirit. The fleet had all chosen to take starboard tack over to the Mull, unless it was looking for flatter water we couldn't understand the tactic and chose to short tack up the Jura coastline and take the starboard hitch once we reached the Southern tip of Jura, a great call as it turned out. Tangle came over to loosely cover us and the battle was on. We were getting pasted by the waves, but closing on Tangle who was struggling with the amount of canvas she had out. She crossed ahead and tacked but we had broken cover and she soaked off behind and finally stuck some reefs in that left her about half a mile behind, this would have lifted spirits but for runner Colin making a dash for the windward rail to chunder, giving the Skipper a splattering and leaving what looked suspiciously like a crème caramel on the side deck (this would be present for the next hour and a half until we tacked to clear the Mull). About this time Warrior appeared under the boom, footing faster and pointing 10 degrees higher, as she popped out round the forestay Andy Miles on the bow commented "nothing goes upwind like a cheque book". Oh well should the Russians choose to fight the next war at sea without engines we're well placed to give them a run for their money.

So it's big decision time approaching the Mull. We've got 25 + knots of wind against a full flowing spring tide, and it's getting dark. In the immortal words of the Blues Brothers, "we're on a mission from God – HIT IT". Highland Spirit and Laura crossed ahead on port and the thought that they were giving the Mull a good offing crossed my mind. We pushed on wanting to cut the mileage but have some margin of safety on what would soon become a very

unforgiving lee shore. Finally putting the tack in onto port we were almost immediately in hell. The sea seemed to have holes in it, I looked for anything that popped up to put the bow onto to prevent it falling into the abyss. My greatest fear was getting put about by the mayhem and the consequences for those on deck. As it transpired the only casualty was myself on the helm when we ran out of options to park the bow and it disappeared into a black pit, catapulting me off the aft quarter and fortunately into the cockpit, balletic it wasn't. Eventually we found some less chaotic water and tacked to see presumably Tangles' lights to leeward, we didn't envy them. About this time the radio sparked into life with a report of a flare having been sighted, worrying moments for all. We didn't want to imagine what might have transpired but we were in no position to offer any help having barely survived ourselves. It still remains a mystery as to what had been seen.

As we flew round the Mull and started to ease the sheets it became apparent that we could probably hold the kite, I proposed it tentatively to the crew, who like myself were still in some state of shock (having seen much of the keel on a number of occasions). "Let's have a brew first eh?" suggested Simon, a proposal that was unanimously agreed. Suitably refreshed, the kite was popped up and we sped toward Sanda. After a couple of hours the wind had headed and we could no longer hold the kite. Once we had doused the beast we had the weirdest experience. The sea flattened off to almost mill pond like stillness yet we had 20 knots of breeze on a close reach, the feeling of planing along in the dark over black glass will live with me forever.

As we continued to bear away toward Holy Island in the first light of dawn the waves had built again, and a fierce steep short chop saw us surfing wildly enough to subdue any desire to hoist the kite again. We could see nothing behind and fervently hoped everything was ok on Tangle and Highland Spirit, up ahead was Labasheeba. Our time from Craighouse to Lamlash was the 3rd quickest in the fleet, beating seasoned campaigner J120 Nunatak - now I know that we probably had more help from the tide, but hey that's still a bloody good result from an 18 year old boat!

Col and Tim were back on form for Goat Fell and cracked it off in a respectable 4:25 and returned to the boat to tell us that we were 5th overall!

We just managed to keep Pippa at bay to sail into Troon in the same position. What an event, and a result that I doubt we will ever beat... unless we can get hold of something a tad quicker. I wonder what's up for sale on Apollo Duck? Oh and what happened to Moby J? Martin being of sound mind and a bloody good skipper retired and took the Crinan, which made Rebel the smallest boat to go through the overfalls at peak tide. We're proud of Rebel and of ourselves and eternally grateful to all the organisers who set out such a fantastic playground for us to play. We do hope to see you all again next year.

Cris Miles – Skipper of Rebel