

The acid test

The boat: a standard trim Stingher 800GT powered by twin Suzuki 175hp four-stroke outboard engines

The navigator: a bloke named Mike Conner, who had been drafted in only the night before

The driver: a fellow called Matt Sillifant with a slightly suicidal plan up his sleeve and no competitive racing experience whatsoever

The human damage: one split knee, a set of stomach muscles so badly torn that they had to be welded back together and an extraordinary amount of blood in Matt's urine

The boat damage: none



They call it The Southern Isles Challenge Cup. Well, they do now. They never used to call it anything at all because it didn't exist. Then Matt Sillifant got a hankering to break a record. He told everyone that he would circumnavigate all the islands south of mainland Britain in the fastest time possible using the least amount of fuel. And that's exactly what he's done.

After catching wind of the idea, a number of manufacturers were wetting themselves to get involved. But from the very start Matt knew exactly what he was after. "I chose the Stingher because it's one of the driest RIBs I know," said Matt. "I've had around 15 years of RIBing experience and in my opinion its one of finest 8 metre boats available. I went for the Suzuki engines because they're the most fuel efficient."

A major goal of the challenge was to encourage boat-builders and engine and transmission manufacturers to work together in order to maximise all aspects of fuel efficiency. "These days everyone is much more aware not only of fuel costs but also the impact on the environment and this is particularly true in the commercial maritime sector," Matt explained.

The pair completed the 540-mile voyage with three re-fuelling stops and used a total of 1290 litres of fuel, which

ain't bad seeing as the engines were continually accelerating and decelerating due to the steep seas.

Matt first had a crack at the voyage back in June, but was forced to abort due to rough seas and fog. So when the forecast predicted a perfect little weather window, he knew he had to take his chance. Unfortunately, it was too short

notice for Matt's original navigator, John Puddifoot of the RYA, who had been headhunted for another record attempt from London to Monaco. Onto the stage stepped Mike Connor of MRL, the company that had supplied Matt with the Stingher.

When the pair launched at four in the morning at Southampton the weather >



Underway, making good time in flat seas with 350hp of Suzuki beef battering away at the back door

The boys might be smiling for the camera but you know they're in pain



was so perfect that Mike had slung on nothing more substantial than a T-shirt and a pair of shorts. The record ahead of them looked as breakable as the glassy waters of the Solent.

The first sign of trouble came around 20 miles south of the Isle of White when they came across a brisk little force two, gusting three. However, millpond conditions quickly returned as they passed Alderney and at times the boat was pushing 58 knots. They soon arrived at St Helier, where the tide was out and the pair lost 20 minutes before they could reach the refuelling point.

'Winds picked up to force four or five and two metre waves began the rhythmic slam against the hull'



They were around 50 miles from Guernsey when they realised just how wrong the weather forecast had been. Winds picked up to force four or five and two metre waves began the rhythmic slam against the hull.

"We spent more time in the air than we did in the water," said Mike who had, by this stage, donned his heavy weather gear. It was at some point during this section of the journey that Matt managed to split his knee open when a particularly large wave rocked the boat. Conditions grew so bad that they stopped and spent 20 minutes trying to decide whether or not to retire.

The pair eventually continued, but Matt's knee and the heavy conditions had slowed them down to around 25 knots and Mike began to wonder if they were going to complete the course within the allotted 24 hours.

The ensuing conversation, which may very well have been integral to the success of the challenge, went something like this:

Mike: "Matt, you're driving this boat like a fairy!"

Matt: "Well how the f***k do you want me to drive it?"

Mike: "Drive it like you stole it!"
With that the throttle went down like an horny cheerleader and the pair crashed their way through the surf to complete the voyage with an impressive time of 20 hours and 32 minutes.

The injuries of battle may have been painful at the time but they were as good as hard currency down the pub afterwards, where Matt's impressive tales of torn stomach muscles and bleeding bladders earned him one or two well deserved beers.

The boat

It's worth pointing out that the challenge was carried out in a standard

800GT. To help with the attempt it was fitted with optional sprung Ullman seats, twin Suzuki 175hp four-stroke outboard engines, Seastar hydraulic steering and Simrad CX34 Radar Chart plotter, with the latest DX45 Radar scanner and RD68 VHF/DSC Ships Radio.

But it was still a standard craft - the sort that anyone can pull off the shelf, complete with Garmin 298C GPS, Icom 421 VHF/DSC radio, compass and mooring cover for around £47,495.

So if you're thinking about investing in a RIB then you should thank Mike and Matt for their stoic efforts in the field of quality control. Because they've just taken this little boat on the most thorough test-drive imaginable. If it can deal with The Southern Isles Challenge Cup, then it ought to make mincemeat of your family day out. 

Standard features

- Hypalon tapered tubes
- Hydraulic steering
- 600-litre stainless steel under floor fuel tank
- Raised sun deck with cushions
- Sun deck extensions with cushions to bow and stern
- Burr wood instrument panel with switches
- Electric bilge pump
- 100-litre fresh water tank with electric shower system
- Twin helmsman leaning seat with storage compartments
- Four-seat aft bench with under seat rear storage
- Two under deck storage compartments
- Front anchor locker
- Moulded front anchor guide with mooring cleat
- Moulded steering console with screen and stainless steel hand rails
- Sports steering wheel

Specification

LOA:	8m
Beam:	3m
Int Length:	7.40m
Int Width:	1.75m
Max hp:	431
People:	12
CE category:	B
Tube size:	65-45cm (tapered)
Hull weight:	1,230kg

Contact

MRL
01455 617007
www.mrl-uk.com