

THE GIRLS GEAR

HIGHFIELD OM500,
HONDA 75HP,
ICOM HANDHELD
WATERPROOF
VHF, COASTAL
PRO SUSPENSION
SEATING,
RAYMARINE GPS
& VHF, FUSION
SOUND SYSTEM

THOUGH THIS HONDA-POWERED CRAFT

was not driven by me, my assistant PBR editor Morwenna and her fellow crewmember Hannah Glatzel entered this little aluminium-hulled craft into the Round Ireland Challenge. Pink Panther, as she was called, won the affections of everyone following or participating in the event, and in many ways the quirky combination of this teenage crew and their little pink boat became the face, indeed the spirit, of the event itself. Pink Panther was never built as a challenge boat; rather it was a true example of a genuine production boat, albeit suitably equipped for the task in hand. Featuring a 75hp Honda four-stroke outboard, a Raymarine GPS and VHF, a Fusion sound system and an Icom VHF handheld radio, this deep-vee-hulled, sub-5-metre RIB proved immensely capable. In my view, and based upon all that I witnessed, the 4.9m Highfield's seakeeping qualities were attributable to the fact that a high sheer to her bow and a broad forefoot to a hull that included pronounced spray rails gave this boat superb lift and a genuine ability in a following sea. Its relatively chunky design and beamy proportions also made it very stable laterally – both at rest and



underway. Big 'elephant'-style scuppers meant the boat suffered no ill effect if a rogue sea was shipped, but it has to be said that she was probably one of the driest boats taking part in the challenge. The importance of good balance can't be overstated either, and much care was taken on the part of the builders to get the RIB's central point of balance just right, particularly with offshore use in view. With this in mind, the vessel's underdeck fuel tank and sturdy double-width helm console were positioned just a fraction more forward than usual to ensure the boat gave an absolutely level ride in all sea states. Pink Panther, quite rightly in my opinion, was not rigged for speed but rather for safety and offshore sea kindness. This approach to its fit-out and general rigging paid dividends and meant that even though the Highfield's aluminium hull was much lighter than a GRP equivalent, it became abundantly clear to all that Pink Panther had the ability to punch through anything that came its way without the tendency to fly its head. No matter how adverse the conditions grew, this little boat just kept going in the same steady fashion, mile after mile, hour after hour. Despite its size, it never faltered, and by the time the boat had 1,200 miles under its belt, it still looked as if it had just been wheeled right out of the showroom. In talking to Morwenna and Hannah to gain their assessment of the kit they carried aboard Pink Panther, they confirmed the following: the Icom handheld waterproof VHF performed impeccably; the CoastalPro suspension seating attracted the same critique from them as my own review detailed; the Raymarine GPS with its touch screen technology also behaved in a similar fashion to the Lowrance unit aboard Ribquest

One – in essence, water on the navigation screen disabled it and confused its 'touch to operate' technology, with the result that even a raindrop was capable of plotting a waypoint! Unbeknown to the girls, the GPS had a 'no rocks' navigation setting, which, being hidden within a very complicated menu system, proved immensely difficult to find and turn off. This seemingly dangerous default setting not only hid rocks but small islands too! The Raymarine fixed 25-watt waterproof VHF, on the other hand, stood up to the test and performed reliably throughout the challenge. The Honda 75hp outboard never missed a beat and proved the ideal partner to this 4.9m. This engine's reliability, quality of construction and economic performance were nothing short of exemplary. Lastly, the Fusion waterproof sound system became synonymous with our all-girl Pink Panther team and was most certainly put to good use, because wherever they went, it was possible to hear them long before you could see them! In fact, everyone, I think, got the message that the Fusion proved to be Morwenna and Hannah's favourite piece of kit! In summary, and by way of conclusion, the Round Ireland Powerboat & RIB Challenge proved to be the perfect endorsement for the Highfield RIB and allowed its merits to really shine. The course and all that it held proved the ultimate boat test environment and brought to the fore the merits of this special boat in a manner that proved its worth beyond all doubt. **HMS**

SEA SAFE SYSTEMS

WHEN WE KNEW we were going to be driving a pink boat, we knew we had to go the 'whole hog' and wear pink kit... the funny side of this being (believe it or not) that neither of us even like pink! However, the gear that SeaSafe supplied us made our pink parade that bit more bearable! SeaSafe gave the option of their products being embroidered and we made full use of this. The jackets & life jackets were brandished with both "Team Pink Panther" and the Round Ireland logo. This, along with the pretty unique bright pink colour scheme, meant we were

unmistakably recognisable wherever we went! The jackets were both warm and comfortable and surprisingly waterproof, with ample room in the pockets for your phone (or much needed lip balm, ladies!). The automatic lifejackets were equally comfortable, and one of our favourite pieces of kit. I think it would be safe to say that SeaSafe have helped chip away at our aversion to pink, and we have worn our SeaSafe gear with pride multiple times since! www.seasafe.co.uk
MO, TEAM PINK PANTHER



PINK PANTHER

there were moments when both of us thought 'I don't know how much more of a battering I can take'



TWO TEENAGE GIRLS, MO MONTGOMERY-SWAN & HANNAH GLATZEL (AT THE TIME 18 & 16 RESPECTIVELY) SET OUT TO PROVE EVERYBODY WRONG



PINK PANTHER

BOAT NAME: PINK PANTHER

SKIPPER: MORWENNA MONTGOMERY-SWAN & HANNAH GLATZEL

COUNTRY: UK

BOAT LENGTH: 4.9M

BOAT: HIGHFIELD OCEANMASTER 500

ENGINE: HONDA BF 75

What can I say ...? Music blaring all the time ... dancing and singing to our hearts' content ... having a celebratory drink when we got in to each port ... But it wasn't just these features that made 'Round Ireland 2013' outstanding – it was the closeness of the teams.

The most memorable part of the trip itself was definitely Day 5 when we got hammered by the weather conditions and sea state but managed to keep our morale high and stuck together at all times. It was hours before we could see land again, and being stuck in a force 7 in confused seas, travelling at 10 knots, was really taking its toll on the group. When we finally saw land on the horizon, everyone was so overjoyed we overlooked the fact that there was at least five hours left! The most extraordinary thing we saw during that passage was the dolphins, who decided to run between Black Panther and us in the middle of the force 7 – I got the shock of my life as they popped up! I'm still sure they were attracted to our bright-pink Highfield RIB. I have great admiration for Andy/Stuart (Merlin) and Jurgen (Searider) who managed to survive the 15-hour day with no music and all by themselves.

Some people have asked: 'How did two teenage girls manage to get around?' The answer to that is: because of our determination to prove everyone wrong and show that we could do it. There were times when we were both injured with bad knees and were very tired after long days on the water. However, we managed to carry on just to prove we could do it – being part of a team both on the boat, with Black Panther and in our 'small-boat' group helped as we stuck together and kept morale high! I'm sure there were moments when both of us thought 'I don't know how much more of a battering I can take', yet we managed to be one of only 14 boats to get round without trailing a leg. This, of course, was not

without the exceptional help of Steve and Dave on Black Panther. They were our buddy boat the whole way round and were always making sure that we were fine!

I would like to say, on behalf of Mo and myself, a massive thank you to Hugo and the crew for arranging the trip – even though Mo is part of this crew ... Also, a huge thank you to everyone who supported us throughout and believed we could do it, whether it was by dancing with us, buying us drinks or just following our progress. We couldn't have done it without the help from the other teams. Finally, thanks to Highfield Boats for providing an amazing pink boat that never failed us and will go down in ribbing history.

Hannah Glatzel, Pink Panther



BLACK PANTHER

Many of us, including myself, had never seen seas such as those we battled through on the leg to Fenit.



BLACK PANTHER

BOAT NAME: BLACK PANTHER

SKIPPER: STEVE HARRISON

CREW: DAVE SWIFT

COUNTRY: UK

BOAT LENGTH: 4.9M

BOAT: HIGHFIELD OCEANMASTER 500

ENGINE: HONDA BF 75



STEVE HARRISON AND DAVE SWIFT PAIR UP TO PUT THEIR "OFF THE SHELF" HIGHFIELD 500 TO THE ULTIMATE TEST

Our challenge began off the North Devon coast when we first tested the Pink and Black Highfield RIBs in a moderate sea. Underpowered and poorly balanced, we had a choice to make. With just three weeks to the start date, should we scrap the idea or should we go back and change the set-up? Thankfully we chose the latter option. More power, better weight distribution, a few extra tweaks and the 'Panthers' were ready (we hoped).

Just reaching the start line was one of our biggest challenges, an experience shared by most of the entrants. The expense was also beginning to weigh on our minds.

There were so many questions as we left Milford Haven ... Are the boats capable? Are we capable? Will the girls be OK? Have we bitten off more than we can chew? Is the weather going to hold? Will we regret entering? At the end of the 12 days the answers were as follows: more than; just about; they were fantastic; nearly; no; absolutely not.

Many will talk about the scenery, the challenges, the weather and the conditions. We all experienced the same situations; some of us got through them and others

had the misfortune to have to retire. Many of us, including myself, had never seen seas such as those we battled through on the leg to Fenit. Most of us had never battled heavy weather on consecutive days, with wet gear, fatigue and discomfort becoming the norm; but for us, right from the beginning, the only important thing was to get the boats home with crew and kit in one piece.

MOST OF ALL, WE LEARNED THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAMWORK AND TEAM SPIRIT.

We learned that the Irish people are as magnificent as their reputation suggests; we learned that the west coast of Ireland, even through the mist and rain, is one of the most awe-inspiring coastlines in the world; we learned how incredible the rigid inflatable boat is in all situations (if driven correctly) – and believe me, in 25ft Atlantic seas, you have to have faith in your boat.

Most of all, we learned the importance of teamwork and team spirit. The small-boat fleet made the decision together very early in the challenge that we would stay together

no matter what. 'One boat stops, we all stop.' Our safety boat, Top Hat, was our shepherd. Paul Glatzel and crew kept us together in all conditions and earned the respect of every boat in the fleet. Never more than 200 yards apart, the small boats left together, battled together and arrived together.

Pink Panther was a risk. A calculated gamble. We had to build a capable boat and had to trust that the girls could do the job. In the end, both the boat and the girls did a better job than most, including us – always determined, never flinching and always focused, as we were, on the finish line, Mo, Hannah and 'Pinkie' became the perfect team.

The moral of the story in a challenge such as this, played out perfectly by the Pink Panther and her team, is 'look after your boat and she will look after you'. Our thanks to the organising team, the Irish people, Paul Glatzel and family, Mo and Hannah ...

... WE LEARNED HOW INCREDIBLE THE RIGID INFLATABLE BOAT IS IN ALL SITUATIONS ...