

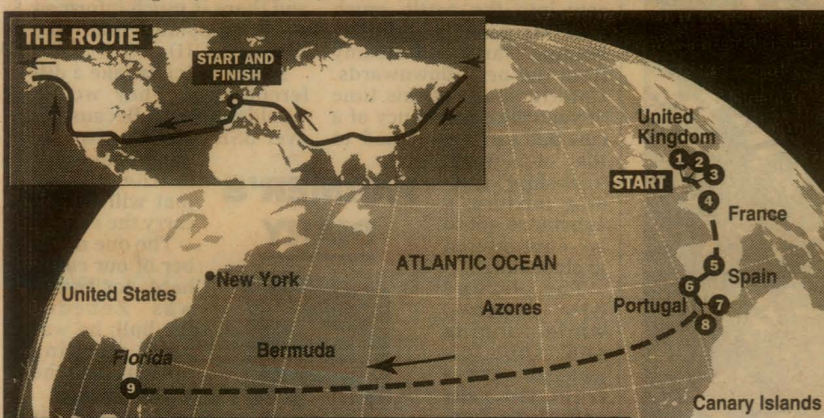
OUTDOORS

Who dares, goes Around the world by bike and boat; the Ridgways take a tip from Captain Bl

Pictures: KENNY BROWN/FSP



Two's company for three years: Steve Smith, left, and Jason Lewis test the water in the boat specially designed for their marathon trip



STAGE 1: EUROPE AND THE ATLANTIC

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|--|------------------------------------|--|
| 1 July 12
Depart Greenwich, London | 4 July 19-20
Arrive in Paris | 7 August 24-28
Arrive Cape Vincent, final sea preparation |
| 2 July 14
Depart Rye for France on pedal powered boat | 5 August 9-10
Arrive in Madrid | 8 September 14
Depart Cape Vincent (weather permitting) |
| 3 July 16
Set off on cycle ride to Paris | 6 August 17-18
Arrive in Lisbon | 9 Mid November
Projected arrival in Florida |

On a pedal boat made for two

Stephen Venables meets two men who have just set off to circumnavigate the globe entirely under their own steam

EARLY on Thursday morning Jason Lewis and Steve Smith headed out from Rye on the Sussex coast into the crowded shipping lanes of the English Channel. Their vessel was nothing more substantial than a tiny pedal boat; their immediate target was Boulogne on the north coast of France.

That in itself takes a peculiar brand of courage — or craziness, depending on your point of view. Ultimately, however, the two men's aim is far more ambitious — a record-breaking 29,000-mile trip round the world, using only pedal power.

The journey, taking in 18 countries and three continents and lasting up to three years, will involve the first crossing of the Channel and the Atlantic and Pacific oceans by two-man pedal boat. It's an awesome prospect.

By now the boat should be

on a trailer heading south through France while Lewis and Smith follow on their Ridgeback mountain bikes. Later this summer they will rejoin the boat in Portugal and embark for the United States.

Steve Smith started planning the project three years ago when he resigned his environmental research post with the OECD in Paris. "I was tired of office life and the whole process of the career ladder," he told me, as he put the finishing touches to his boat. "I wanted to get out and do something really different — something physical — and I wanted to do a genuine first. I was amazed to discover that no one had ever circumnavigated the globe entirely by human power."

Large chunks of land had been walked or bicycled, and the oceans had been rowed, but no one had linked it all together, he said. "It was such an obvious challenge —

such a great idea, which could have been tried by anyone in the last few thousand years."

That was the nearest the quiet 27-year-old came to hyperbole when we met last week. But there was no mistaking the intensity of his immersion in the project. When I asked him about influences he mentioned three random travellers — T. E. Lawrence, Ranulph Fiennes and Chris Bonington — who he felt had all "grabbed life".

His first idea was to inch



Chain reaction: Jason Lewis builds up his muscles for the marathon

round the world's coastlines by canoe — a voyage which he soon realised would take at least 10 years. So his thoughts turned to rowing. His researches took him to the Exeter Maritime Museum, where the curator, Alan Boswell, said: "What about a pedal boat?"

And with that chance injection of lateral thinking, the idea took on a new, elegant logic — Smith and his ex-army companion, 26-year-old Lewis, would pedal all the way round the world by land and sea. Bicycles would take care of the land; for the sea, Alan Boswell would design a special boat to be built by Chris Tipper in Exeter.

The expedition represents a huge act of faith. The voyage from Portugal to Florida, a distance of about 3,500 miles, should take about 90 days. The original plan was to emulate Dwight Collins, who made the first pedal crossing of the Atlantic, in just 41 days, by the much shorter west-east route from Newfoundland.

Repeating that northern route would have been the climax of a three-year easterly journey. Now, however, a serious shortage of cash has forced them to change their plans.

Attracting sponsors demands something dramatic. So they are tackling the Atlantic first, from east to west. That means pedalling the much longer southern route with the Trade Winds. The only consolation is that it will be a lot warmer.

They do have support from DHL, the courier company, which is organising all the transcontinental movements of the boat. And Smith raised

some money with a recent, record-breaking 16-day bike ride from London to Marrakesh in Morocco. His father, a self-confessed "hassler", has also brought in some cash from 800 members of the public, who all have their names inscribed on the boat. And there have also been donations of vital equipment and supplies.

But, after spending £60,000 getting the expedition off the ground, the team still has debts of £25,000. They desperately need a major sponsor but as Kenny Brown, the film cameraman, remarked: "We could have sat around in London forever, waiting for a sponsor, and got nowhere. It seemed better to get going and show that we really mean business."

So they are starting their three-year odyssey with just £2,000 between them. It is a gesture of supreme panache.

In the frantic countdown to departure last week, Steve Smith seemed remarkably calm. The ride to Morocco gave him the knowledge that he can see through the moments of pain and tedium, almost as a detached observer, to the rewards. He looks forward particularly to the open spaces of Alaska and, although he was not sure why, to Japan. Between those two there will be minor details like pedalling across the Bering Sea and down the Kamchatka Peninsula. And then there will be the whole Asian continent still to cross, starting with China and Tibet...

Plans for those later stages are inevitably still fluid but Steve Smith hopes that some time in 1997 he and Lewis will pedal back across the English Channel.

HOW THE BOAT WORKS

WHEN I met Steve Smith last week in a basement in Putney, south-west London, he was still sanding, painting, varnishing and titivating his craft. The object of all this affection looked like a large canoe — elegant, sleek and beautifully built.

To conform with the environmental spirit of the expedition, it was built from timber supplied by the Ecological Trade Company — planks of Western red cedar, just a centimetre thick, nailed to a skeleton of mahogany and sheathed in a double veneer of epoxide Cachimbo.

The resulting hull is tough, light, streamlined and watertight, guaranteed to right itself after any capsize. All the supplies for the Atlantic crossing will be stowed in the tapering stern and bow; the latter also provides a claustrophobic sleeping-berth, with just enough room for one man to lie at full stretch. The central cockpit is protected by a sliding hatch of toughened polycarbonate. On its roof are solar panels to power radio and navigation equipment.

Inside, the workings are beautifully simple: bicycle pedals, chain and a gearing device, transforming 60 revolutions of the pedaller's legs to 300 revolutions of the steel prop-shaft, which drives a specially cast aluminium propeller.

There is also improvisation. The grips on the rudder lines are requisitioned angle-grinder handles, the tiny stove gimbal is fashioned from an old bicycle pannier rack, and a variety of pads and cushions are being tested to alleviate the discomfort of hundreds of hours in the saddle.

Pictures: KENNY BROWN/FSP



Two's company for three years: Steve Smith, left, and Jason Lewis test the water in the boat specially designed for their marathon trip