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Pedal power poops out prior to trans-Pacific crossing

By Kathie Tanner
The Cambrian

SAN SIMEON — An unusual international expedition boat ran into bad weather recently and wound up capsized in San Simeon Cove. The boat's computer equipment malfunctioned as well.

Early attempts to right and repair the 26-foot Moshka pedal-driven boat were beached by El Niño-driven nasty weather and high waves. However, crew members had planned to try salvaging the craft again

on Dec. 10, working toward repairing it and resuming their round-the-world "pedal-powered" tour sometime in March or April.

A hatch left open during tricky and lengthy rescue maneuvers and the boat's subsequent mooring here caused the vessel to capsize during the weekend storms, the craft's owners said.

"But she's holding her own. She has a good air pocket, we think, trapped beneath the hull," was the Dec. 7 report on the Pedal for the Planet expedition answering ma-

chine in San Francisco. The team members communicate via web-site with students in 250 schools nationwide, hoping to share their vision of being able to "set a goal and go forward with it," sailor John Walker said.

Walker and fellow sailor Casey Dunn had been on their pedal-powered way to Hawaii from Monterey when problems cropped up in the laptop computers that ran the solar- and wind-powered electron-



Photo by Lee Sutter

Please see Pedal, Page A-4

John Walker, left, and Stuart Smith

THURSDAY, December 11, 1997

Pedal

Continued from Page A-1

ic equipment and communication system.

The two men are part of an international effort that hopes to travel the world using only human power.

Despite earlier disasters — including a man overboard and a playful whale that tipped the craft over — two other team members pedaled the boat from London to Miami in 111 days.

But on Dec. 3, Dunn and Walker were in bad weather, out of power and out of luck. They radioed the Coast Guard in Morro Bay about 1 p.m. Dec. 3, asking to be brought into a safe port.

Their trip to San Simeon took almost 12 hours.

They lost radio contact with the Coast Guard for a time, but the commercial fishing vessel Margaret-O towed the Moshka part-way to shore and later met up with the 44-foot Coast Guard motor life boat (MLB) just south of Cape San Martin.

According to Coast Guard Chief Ben Brown, the MLB is "the Sherman tank of the sea," a big heavy craft with lead weights in the keel designed specifically for rescuing people in 20-foot waves of breaking surf or 30-foot swells.

Going alongside a tiny pedal-powered boat, taking people aboard from it and lashing it down for a tow are tricky tactics on such a vessel, Brown explained.

The high waves and choppy sea made the maneuvers that much more dangerous, he added.

Those conditions may have been the reason the Moshka's hatch was inadvertently left open.

Coast Guard Bosuns Mate 3 Jorge Diaz skipped the boat that went out to bring Dunn, Walker and the craft to shore.

"It was slow and scary. I was afraid we were going to lose it," he said of the trip.

"It's not really stable in water" under those circumstances, Diaz added.

Now, the team has to right the boat, take it to Morro Bay and assess the damage. The chances for destruction aboard is pretty great, given the effects of potentially corrosive salt water on wiring, electrical systems, equipment left aboard and the boat itself.

"We're looking at late March or early April" before the trip can resume, Walker said.

"We just need to get a few hundred miles off-shore," he added.

"We just got caught too close this time," Walker said of the recent dilemma. "That was the problem."