

3rd time's



Three sevens are lucky if you're a gambler. But Bruno Rey didn't come all the way from France to the "canoeing capital of Canada" to play cards. Instead, his Team EADS (European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company) was on a mission to avoid a seventh-place "hat trick" in the fifth annual Raid The North Extreme.

EADS was seventh in its previous two entries in Canada's longest-running expedition-style race in Newfoundland (2001) and Yukon (2002). The 39-year-old Rey and teammates Cyril Margaritis, Laurence Maurin and Stéphane Toussaint, gunning for a decidedly different outcome, made this year's 345-mile race in southwestern Ontario the primary focus of their entire season.

The 17 teams started at 8 a.m., August 17, in Atikokan with a 50-mile bike ride over undulating logging roads. EADS quickly found itself near the back of the pack after taking a wrong turn. Five hours and 29 minutes elapsed by the time EADS arrived at the first checkpoint (in seventh

place, of course!) and took a 54-minute break. Rey marched the team out at 2:23 p.m., more than an hour out of first place.

"We had to push in the sun and heat, and it was very challenging," he said. "We wanted to be in the top of the tables from the beginning."

EADS accelerated its pace in the bush on the first 22-mile trek and was second to arrive at Checkpoint 2 on Sandford Lake at midnight. When it left three hours later, only Toronto's Gearsracing.com and Kenora, Ontario's Fudugazi were ahead. Before the race was 24 hours old, EADS grabbed the lead and wouldn't let go. Meanwhile, wasps hidden in the moss-covered floor of the spruce-riddled forests

welcomed racers to Northwestern Ontario.

Relaxing at checkpoint three, Spirit Canada's Elsa Dahlie estimated she had 20 of her team's 70 wounds.

"The problem is you're walking in line in the bush, the first guy steps on them, the second guy's not looking, and the third and fourth get hit," Dahlie said.

Added teammate Chris Koch, "They're everywhere, literally everywhere. The last time I got stung was by the shoreline. Maybe it helped us hike faster."

Daytime temperatures on August 18 exceeded 95 degrees Fahrenheit with 100 percent humidity. Shade offered no respite from the mugginess. A 100-foot rappel down an ancient pictograph-marked cliff into the refreshing waters of Ann Bay did provide temporary relief before a two-mile paddle and eight-mile trek.

To beat the oppressive conditions — and avoid bushwhacking — EADS took advantage of rules allowing pack rafts. Each member had a kayak paddle and a green inflatable ring with which to float on rivers and lakes.

"When you are in the bush it can be

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TEAM EADS FINALLY WINS RAID THE NORTH EXTREME

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY BOB MACKIN



AS TEAM BELL EXTREME (FAR LEFT, NO. 6) AND TEAM EADS (NEAR LEFT, NO. 5) DISCOVERED, RAID THE NORTH EXTREME PROVED ONCE AGAIN TO BE ONE OF NORTH AMERICA'S MARQUEE ADVENTURE RACES. IT WILL SERVE AS THE 2004 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ADVENTURE RACE.

charm

boring sometimes; it was refreshing to be on the water," Rey said. "For orienteering it's quite better because you go straight, you're not obliged to circle the lake. You save so much time."

Checkpoint 5 featured the course's only manmade wonder, White Otter Castle. Solitary woodsman Jimmy McOuat built the four-story lakeside log mansion in the middle of nowhere 88 years ago. That's where Spirit Canada, which had no pack rafts, took shelter for almost six hours, while captain Dave Hitchon battled heat exhaustion into the morning of August 19. Three-time Canadian Olympic rowing gold medalist Marnie McBean led Gearsracing.com into second place.

Dahlie and Koch towed a canoe containing weary Hitchon and Popik through much of the next 24 miles to a waterfall at Turtle River. Koch joined Hitchon on the sick list, while Dahlie and Popik propelled the team forward in the second 105-mile bike stage.

Life was better for EADS, which met a galloping moose and followed it for 600 feet traveling south on a logging road.

"We slowed down because we were very worried about the moose facing us and suddenly turning left off the road," Rey said. "It was a nice feeling to race with the moose. He won."

Spirit Canada paused frequently for heat-beating swims and to feed ailing Hitchon handfuls of wild raspberries and blueberries.

Teams then trekked 5½ miles to and from a zipline traverse of a Namakam River waterfall before remounting their bikes for the ride to Checkpoint 13. Hitchon's mother, Joan, and son, William, greeted Spirit Canada at the Lac La Croix Ojibway village near the U.S. border before they transitioned to canoes and embarked for Quetico Provincial Park at 3:30 p.m. on the third day of the race.

The pristine, 6.1-million-acre wilderness park with more than 500 lakes was once the path of the Voyageurs. The steadfast French-Canadian men made their living carrying fur and other goods across country in canoes before railways were built across Canada. Racers were free to plot their own paddle-and-portage course

for the next 80 miles with two conditions: visit the four checkpoints in Quetico and don't stray across the border into Minnesota.

EADS was already in the heart of Quetico, beyond Checkpoint 14 at Birch Island, when severe thunderstorms enveloped the area after dusk on the third day of the race. The team paddled to shore and huddled together until the worst of the thunder and lightning passed.

"It was an incredible storm," Rey said. "It was dark, so much water, we were completely wet, even with the tarp."

The clouds parted by nightfall on the fourth day to reveal stunning views of the constellations, Mars and a dazzling Northern Lights display.

"I won't forget about it in my lifetime, that's for sure," Rey said. "It was a good thing for us to (canoe) at night because the water was flat."

EADS moved closer to victory, but only two minutes separated a re-born Spirit Canada from Gearsracing.com at Checkpoint 15 in the battle for second place. Spirit Canada's planned 15-minute



TRUE TO ONTARIO'S BOATING HERITAGE, THE RACE INCLUDED A PADDLING SECTION WITH VOYAGEUR-STYLE CANOES. OTHER WATER SECTIONS ALLOWED TEAMS TO USE PACK RAFTS, WHILE ANOTHER REQUIRED CONTEMPORARY CANOES (AND A DIFFICULT PORTAGE).



nap on a trail stretched to 90 minutes but never became a factor. A sleep-deprived Koch, however, found overnight navigation daunting, as he experienced optical illusions on the water, like the sensation of paddling uphill.

EADS traded its pair of two-seat, lightweight Kevlar canoes for a single, 25-foot-long Voyageur-style canoe just after midnight on August 22.

"When we reached the shore, we asked 'these are the boats we are supposed to use?'" Rey said. "We put our stuff in, and when we wanted to go on the water, we carried and lifted it. Impossible! We had to push it, so we realized what would be the challenge of such heavy boats. We were very surprised as soon as we were on the water. It's a very good boat, not so difficult to maneuver, and the paddles are a little heavy, but very comfortable for that kind of boat."

The team completed the final 3¼ miles from Checkpoint 16 at Pickerel Lake to French Lake via the twisting, reed-riddled French River together in the heavy, spacious vessel. EADS left its paddles behind at Checkpoint 17 and took up pedals by 3

a.m. for the 50-mile bike ride over ATV trails and roads that would lead them to the finish line at Atikokan's Little Falls Golf Course at 8:11 a.m.

By winning the race, and ending the streak of seventh-place finishes, EADS won the \$15,000 (Canadian) first prize and earned an automatic berth in next year's Raid The North Extreme in Newfoundland, which will double as adventure racing's World Championship.

"This year we were tougher, because we had the experience; we knew about the field and the terrain," said Rey, a Paris dentist and 10-year adventure racing veteran. "When we were in France we worked a lot at preparing each activity and knew there could be many options and strategies. So this year was perfect for us."

"Every section we managed step-by-step, and we enjoyed the race from start to finish," he added. "From the time we were leading the race we were very cool, very quiet and didn't have any pressure because we knew that we were not losing time."

Spirit Canada, the 2000 Raid the North Extreme champion, arrived at Checkpoint 17 at 10:18 a.m. with sole possession of

second place after Gearsracing.com failed to find a key portage entry. When her team arrived at 4:11 p.m., McBean was the lead rower and appeared both dirtied and dismayed from the disastrous detour.

The curious locals who gathered for EADS' breakfast-time coronation returned for Spirit Canada's dinnertime finish at 5:35 p.m. Fudugazi passed Wild Rose during the Quetico canoeing leg and finished third with a 52-minute cushion.

Raid The North's 2003 season wrapped-up September 19-21 with the 60-hour national championship at the Canadian Ecology Centre in Mattawa, Ontario. ■

RAID THE NORTH EXTREME, AUGUST 17-22, ATIKOKAN, ONTARIO, CANADA

1. TEAM EADS (FRANCE: BRUNO REY, CYRIL MARGARITIS, LAURENCE MAURIN, STEPHANE TOUSSAINT), 5 DAYS, 11 MINUTES, \$15,000 (CANADIAN); **2. TEAM SPIRIT CANADA**, 5:09:28, \$8,000; **3. TEAM FUDUGAZI**, 5:10:48, \$4,000; **4. TEAM WILD ROSE**, 5:11:22, \$2,000; **5. TEAM PHOENIX**, 5:12:43, \$1,000; **6. TEAM GEARSRACING.COM**, 5:16:24; **7. TEAM DIRTWORLD.COM ADVENTURE RACING TEAM***, 5:13:18; **8. TEAM STAR CHOICE***, 5:13:18.

* FINISHED AFTER FINAL CUT-OFF TIME.