

# Channel Challenge

Terry Sutton

Thousands of refugees in recent months have crossed the Dover Strait in small boats powered by outboard engines.

One hundred years ago, in the 1920s, there was a craze to cross the Dover Strait in small boats powered by outboard engines.

But those were mostly wealthy people, including a few aristocrats, aiming to go the opposite way from Dover to Calais.

This craze reached its climax in June 1929 when 36 "starters" set off from Dover in a race in various sized small craft, all powered by outboard engines. The result was chaos in rain and fog.

None of the craft arrived at Calais under their own power. Some were towed into French ports by French fishermen while more than a dozen of the speed boat pilots were saved by the crews of Channel lightships. Three of the

starters, although lost in fog, tied their craft together and rowed into Calais!

They were not the only ones trying to cross the Channel with the help of small boats. In 1926 thirty-six "aspirants", from a range of nations, set off to swim across the Dover Strait. Each, setting off from France or from Dover, had a small boat to pilot the way. That year there were only five successful crossings. In 1923 only three swimmers were successful while in 1927 three canoeists were.

In the 1920s a young Parisian woman tried crossing from Cap Gris Nez to Dover in a hydrocycle while a Polish seafarer attempted to walk from Dover to France wearing large wooden shoes. He failed to get far.

Today many of these unorthodox Channel crossing attempts are banned by the French maritime authorities for safety reasons.

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