

Feature

Oz under the Vapor.
Photo: Marijn Tjihof

"I WAS LAUNCHED AND SAW AROUND 68MPH APPEAR ON THE GPS AS I DROVE INTO A WALL OF DUST, SAND AND SMALL STONES THAT WERE FLYING HORIZONTALLY IN THE AIR. THEN I MADE THE MISTAKE OF STARTING TO THINK, WHICH IS NOT THE BEST STRATEGY IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES"

Seriously, the sand has a very exfoliating effect out in the desert.
Photo: Ricardo Lui



L-r: Maria Pereira (KiteMama); Ruud van Engelen (H005); Arijen van der Tol (Fast Arie); Jeroen Polter (Dzzy H140); Ricardo Lui (KC88)



Base camp on one of the calmer mornings
Photo: Marijn Tjihof



Oz and Fast Aire, hammer down.
Photo: Marijn Tjihof





THE BLIZZARD OF OZ

JEROEN POTTERS IS A DUTCH BUGGY PILOT, known to his friends as Ozzy and his enemies as H140. In '06, he participated in the gruelling Transat de Sable buggy 'marathon' in the Western Sahara, and when asked what his next challenge was, he boldly claimed: "Racing on a dry lake bed in the USA. The NABX!"

It's taken over two years for him to get out there, and to find other pilots crazy enough to keep up, but read on for Ozzy's account of how the Dutch contingent smashed the buggy speed record and brought the title back to Europe...

"The first to present himself was Ruudje (H5) of Xtreme. I knew that he had been toying with the NABX idea before so it wasn't very hard to convince him. And other guy that was frothing with enthusiasm was Arjen van der Tol or Fast(est) Arie. In the meantime some serious negotiations with Ripsession Kites in Canada, represented by a small Chinese guy, were flowing fast to arrange our presence in the USA. When Michel Dekker, one of the designers at Peter Lynn Products in the Netherlands, got notice of our plan to kick ass at the NABX he offered us full cooperation, helping us out with shipping, kites, materials and other stuff. We knew the new Peter Lynn Reactor II and Vapor were in an advanced design stage and we got green light to take protos with us. At the last moment before departure, finally the pre-production models of the Vapor arrived from Asia. Just a few days before we left Michel Dekker had tested the Vapors on the beach to be sure they were aligned well.

Spare pairs of pants "At Xtreme, all of us apart from Arie packed our Apex buggies. He already had a Libre buggy arranged for him in the USA. Very wise – it meant Arie had space left in his luggage! It wasn't for long though because Ruud and I still had a load of socks and underwear to stuff somewhere. Alright, here we go! On 28th March we left for Las Vegas. No problems at the customs, although the custom agents did look somewhat suspicious at our huge bags. "That's grandma and grandpa" I told them with a wink, because it really looked as if I was carrying a couple of bodies in my bags.

Next day, 29th March, after picking up our gear in Las Vegas, we drove to Lake Ivanpah to get an impression of the area where we were going to go extreme in over the next couple of days. Man, you won't believe the force of the wind out there. I was really surprised to see a couple of Arcs and some handkerchiefs hanging in the air. Nobody on wheels, which according to the locals was because it was somewhat too windy. Hmm, too windy?

Don't think so - let's rock! It is very hard to describe clearly what happened from that moment on. All the time I was walking with my head in the clouds. One day in the morning there was no wind at all while the afternoon it blew our socks off, and the other day it was the other way around; a bit of everything. It became clear that we had picked the right time to come to Las Vegas, for the wind hadn't blown this hard in the past four years.

Vapor trails

At a certain point I was ready to go out with the Peter Lynn Vapor 3.8. Everybody was flying smaller sizes but I was very curious about this new 'toy'. As expected it went like a bullet train: with the hard surface of Lake Ivanpah, a top buggy (Xtreme Apex) and a kite like a Vapor, I soon hit speeds nearing 60mph. But on that first day, I couldn't crack the 60mph mark since I had fitted big foot lights to the buggy. Arie on the other hand at one point came in, "Look, 68mph". Man, with his quiver of Spirits and Libre buggy, he was fast.

Then came the special day. Friday 3rd April. It was a grey morning, the wind was blowing full power and at 5:30am. Arie sat straight up in his bed, watching the American flag that stood there in the wind like a piece of hard board. "Potters... psst... Jeroen, are you awake? Look at that flag, dude!" I thought that I was losing the plot what with wanting to be out there all the time, but Arie is on another planet. "Ruud... psst, let's go!" Our Chinese Candian friend, whom we had deprived of much sleep over the last few days thanks to our adrenalin addiction, crawled out of bed complaining "Man, you guys killing me: buggy, buggy, buggy, every day more buggy... I'm so tired now". But he and Maria (Kitemama), who were taking care of us wonderfully, arranged a great breakfast before we left to 'the Playa'. Man, you won't believe the force of the wind at that spot. The locals said we'd be crazy to go out and ride in this wind. "Me first!" I said to Arie before heading out with a proto Peter Lynn Reactor II 2.2.

Dedication, ooh that's what you need...

The day before, I set my personal record of 70mph with the Peter Lynn Vapor 3.8, so I wanted to give it all I had to break the world record of 72.8mph! I was launched and saw around 68mph

appear on the GPS as I dove into a wall of dust, sand and small stones that were flying horizontally in the air. And then I made the mistake of starting to think, which is not the best strategy in these circumstances. I returned and gave the Reactor II to Arie who took his turn to go for the world record. He dashed away and after a short run he came back with a speed of 72.1pmh on his GPS. And that with a Peter Lynn Reactor III! Earlier that week Arie had equalled the record with the Spirit 3.3m. Arie thought that the Reactor's bridle was set too tight, so we adjusted it a little bit, but in the meantime the wind was loosing force so finally Arie decided to take the Spirit 3.3m and took off. After a while we got rather nervous because he drove away into the distance and we couldn't see him anymore. Imagine that something went wrong while he was way out there ... I didn't want to think about it, and was happy to finally see him return...75.2mph! He did it, a massive new world record! But Arie wasn't ready yet: "I'm off" he said and after a couple of runs, while we doubted if he would manage to stay in the buggy, he came back with the biggest possible grin on his face. Unbelievable, he had been able to push the limits up to a crazy 77.05pmh. The world record for buggy racing was pulverised and now belongs to a Dutchman: Arie, our hero! During our NABX trip we've been able to test the Peter Lynn Vapor and Reactor II extendedly. Where in Europe is it possible to test a proto with speeds exceeding 70mph? The Vapor proved to be a super stable kite that points very high into the wind while remaining controllable. As for the so called 'intermediate' Reactor II, well on this remarkable Friday it certainly was not intermediate. It saw 72.08mph and remained very stable even under these extreme circumstances. Together with the Xtreme Apexx buggy it formed a formidable alliance.

A big thanks to everybody that supported us to make our buggy race dream come true! This was the story of my life (so far): NABX 2009. Good winds all, Jeroen Potters a.k.a. 'Ozzy'.