I was so happy'

MANY must have thought that Pete Winchester's Humber crossing days were over.

Having swam it 68 times, his Humber King title was probably safe. And at 72 years old, he's not ashamed to say that he's no spring chicken.

But something told Pete there was another Spurn Point to Cleethorpes swim in him yet.

The task was more daunting than ever. His last crossing was in 2006 when he swam for three hours to Spurn Point and then rode an aqua-cycle back, which took another four hours.

He's seven years older now - and it made the swim he has done 69 times before a lot more nerve-racking.

"I was very conscious of my age this time around. There aren't many people who have done this sort of time, let alone at 72, so I didn't know what impact it would have on my body.

"And even though I had done it before, there was a seven-year gap.

"People were warning me about the low temperatures at the middle of the water where it is deepest. Sometimes, when you get there, it's like hitting a brick wall.

"There was a lot to think about this time around. All of those things made me a lot more nervous about this swim than any I have done before."

But the fear didn't deter Pete. If anything, it just forced him to train harder. For months, he has been swimming between the flyover on the A180 and the Corporation Bridge with training partner Mark Bird, building up his stamina.

"I trained harder because I was nervous. Mark really pushed me on that little bit further every time so when it came to the day I felt ready for it."

At 6.35pm on Saturday all the hard work paid off. Pete completed his 69th Humber swim in two hours and 41 minutes - three minutes faster than the first time he crossed the estuary in 1978 while in his 30s.

"All the worry and hard work just meant that when I got to the other side, the feeling was that much better. There was a strange, sickly feeling in my stomach so I couldn't see the shore. But suddenly, I dug deep and got a handful of sand. I was as happy as I had ever been when I swam."

"I still couldn't see anything but I could hear my crew going 'good swim' and 'fantastic time'. And even though I had wondered if this swim was a good idea, at that very moment, all I could think about was the next one. I want to do it again as soon as possible."

"The swim raised more than £1,000 for the Grimsby and Cleethorpes Yacht Club and the North East Lincolnshire Sports Association. Pete is a member of the club and is raising money to buy training boats to encourage more people into the sport. But Pete's next swim will be dedicated to a friend of more than 30 years, Annette Truman.

"Annette was the secretary of the North East Lincolnshire Sports Association when Pete did his first swim - and when he did his last one in 2006, the group made him sports personality of the year. She is now suffering from Parkinson's Disease but it hasn't stopped helping Pete get sponsorship for his 70th swim, likely to be in August. It will be in aid of Parkinson's UK."

"She's been a great friend for 30 years and has done so much for the sporting community in this area. We've already got quite a lot of support and I'm hoping to do the swim as soon as possible."

"I'm hoping to do the 70th crossing in early August because I want to retain my fitness. I really expected my body to be in a bad way after Saturday but I can honestly say that on Sunday, I had fully recovered. There wasn't even any tightness in my muscles."

As well as his own crossing, Pete will be helping others across the Humber in the future. Mark Bird, who he has been training with, will be doing his own Spurn Point to Cleethorpes swim soon. Pete has also been training Mark Padley, the Hull swimmer, originally from North Thoresby, who plans to take on the English Channel on Tuesday September 15. Pete will also be advising another swimming legend who will be coming to the area soon. Dr Julie Broadbrow of the Grimsby and Cleethorpes ASA Christmas Morning Swim.

To see these pictures and more visit www.grimsbytelegraph.co.uk/pictures

IN TRAINING: Swimmer Pete Winchester prepares for his 70th Humber swim, by training in Grimsby Dock. Insert, a wet, cold but triumphant Pete in December 1969, after winning the Grimsby and Cleethorpes ASA Christmas Morning Swim.

DEDICATION: Pete's 70th Humber swim will be dedicated to a friend of more than 30 years, Annette Truman, who was secretary of the North East Lincolnshire Sports Association when Pete did his first swim.

LEGEND: Dr Julie Broadbrow of the Grimsby and Cleethorpes ASA Christmas Morning Swim.