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# At home on the high seas

## TONI YOUNGHUSBAND

Single women sigh and silver-haired sea dogs groan with envy when they hear of Ginette Roper's good fortune.

But this diminutive blonde is more concerned about leaving her thriving optometry practice than revelling in the prospect of sailing the high seas with 11 men.

Sailor, career woman, wife and mother, Ginette (35) is the only woman aboard the 12-man Dalys International Insurance's yacht, an entrant in next year's prestigious Cape to Rio race.

"People are generally surprised when they hear what I'm doing," says Ginette. "I think it's because I am so small, they wonder how I have the strength to crew."

Lest the chauvinists among us imagine she's on board to cook and clean, Ginette is quick to point out that chores are shared by everyone

Of her 11 male crew members, Ginette says matter-of-factly: "I know them all well, I have sailed with all of them many times before."

A sailor of only eight years experience, Ginette has nevertheless encountered enough adventure on the open ocean to last a lifetime.

"In 1987 I was given a last minute opportunity to take part in the Beachcomber yacht race from Mauritius to Durban.

"I had never sailed before and it was the year Cyclone Demoina struck. We survived three knock-downs but I loved it and have sailed ever since."

### Babysitting

Ginette did part of the Cape to Rio last year. "My husband Mike did one leg and I did the other so that at least one of us was with our son Nicholas."

This year, Mike will do all the babysitting.

"When I started yacht racing I discovered why people go to deserts. Being out there with



Ginette Roper is a dab hand on deck but she won't be roped into doing the cooking when she and 11 male crew set sail for Rio in January next year. *Picture: Hannes Thiar*

nothing around you for miles and miles is a total cleanser. The outside world is forgotten and the yacht becomes central to your life."

Her biggest nightmare is leaving her optometry practice. "My patients enjoy the fact that I will be racing but business is tough these days."

She is unruffled about shar-

ing a yacht with 11 men and surprised at the fuss. A major concern on board is privacy. "So we have an unwritten rule: that part of the boat which is in front of the cockpit is off limits unless you want to be by yourself."

Ginette's job on the yacht will be communications and some public relations work when

they dock. "We are hoping to have satellite communications installed which will make us the only yacht to have them."

Last year the yacht crossed the finish line in seventh place, this year they hope to finish much faster.

"We did it in 21 days last time, this time we'll be quicker," she says.