

SA'S YACHTSMAN OF THE YEAR JOINS FORCES WITH BRUCE SAVAGE

King's set to rule at popular regatta

THERE WILL be even more to the annual Rothmans Week this year than taking the honours. This year's event will also serve as a dress rehearsal of sorts for local yachtsmen who will soon take part in the classic Cape-to-Rio race.

DALE GRANGER previews the popular regatta:

SOUTH AFRICA's finest yachtsmen with a curriculum vitae of racing at top international regattas, including the Olympics, the Admiral's Cup and even the Whitbread round-the-world race, will pit their skills against one another on the leading yachts when Rothman's Week starts in Table Bay tomorrow.

Former Yachtsman of the Year Chris King, the winner of the regatta two years ago who will be sailing the only Mumm-36 in the country, MSC Ballyhoo, will be starting as the favourite.

For the next week he is without his longtime right-hand man, Rick Nankin, with whom he formed a most successful partnership in local sailing, but has been joined by South African Admiral's Cup middle-boat skipper Bruce Savage, who comes on board as tactician with the pedigree of Olympic experience at Barcelona. He is the current Nations' Cup champion.

Competitive

The yacht, who comes with a proud record of having been South Africa's top entry at the Admiral's Cup back in August, squares up to two highly competitive Stretch Farr-40s: last year's winning yacht, Ajax, skippered by former Fireball world champion Martin Lamprecht, who also sailed for South Africa at the Barcelona Olympics three years ago, and John Thirlwell's Toyota Forklift.

This year Ajax is sailing without the defending champion, nine-time regatta winner Geoff Meek, who has been enticed as co-skipper (with Hanno Teuteberg) to the South African Navy's new Fast-42, Audio Vision. Sailing without his regular crew on a new yacht, Meek

exchanges his customary tag as favourite for the role of dark horse with an outside chance.

Lamprecht's crew includes three South Africans who have flown home after having competed on the world circuit. They are Jonathan Swain, who has been on top yachts in the United States, Joe de Kock, who has been sailing with Broomstick, and Colin Richardson, the only South African to have sailed the entire Whitbread round-the-world race last year.

Double points

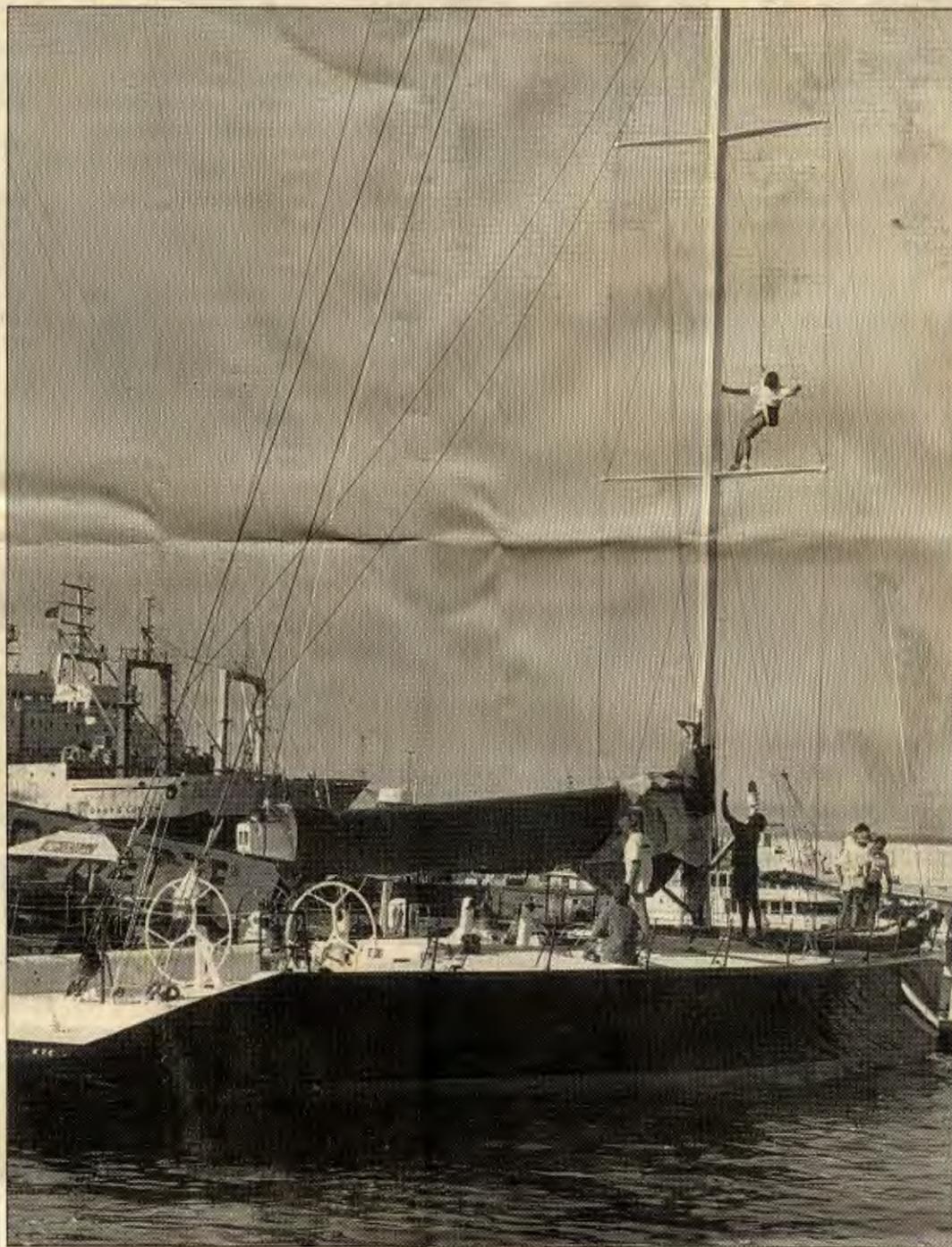
While Lamprecht is delighted to finally be at the helm, he was less than enthusiastic about the race committee's measuring Ajax this week and penalising her four seconds a mile from her original rating. This could prove to be particularly harsh on the yacht in the long-distance race from Table Bay to Saldanha, which will as usual count for double points.

Lamprecht said that Toyota Forklift should beat him over the line, having running backstays, but it was crucial that the two Stretch Farr-40s avoided getting involved in a match-racing duel which would only serve to allow MSC Ballyhoo to get away.

Best crew

He regards his crew as the best in the regatta, and added that winds between eight and 15 knots "will suit us fine as long as it's not too light and choppy, which will be great for the Mumm".

Overseas Cape-to-Rio yachtsmen already in town will undoubtedly use the opportunity to have a good look at South African sailing standards during the next week.



ROYAL-BLUE RACER: Fancourt's Morning Glory, the brand-new 80-foot maxi yacht owned by German computer magnate Hasso Plattner, will beat the Swedish maxi Nicorette (Ludde Ingvall) to Rio — and with the right weather could cross the ocean in 14 days, predicts local naval architect Alex Simonis, who designed Broomstick, which holds the current record of 15 days.

PICTURE: ANNE LAING