

# Sailing off to Rio

**Y**ou know you are doing something right when President Thabo Mbeki comes to christen the yacht you will captain in the MTN-Cape to Rio 2000 yacht race.

Before the last drop of sparkling wine had trickled out of the shattered bottle the President was congratulating Marion Cole, sailor extraordinaire, who will skipper the new yacht African Renaissance in the race that sets off from Cape Town in early January.

This will be Marion's second Cape to Rio race, in 1996 she led the all-woman crew of the yacht Kelly Girl which finished in the top third.

The diminutive sailor, who has been sailing ever since she met her husband 25 years ago, lays claim to being the first women skipper to complete the Cape to Rio.

Marion grew up on the West Coast, in Grotto Bay, where they have salt water coursing through their veins. Moving to Cape Town to further her studies, she entered the working world as a teacher, spending time in District Six at the Zinzendorf Moravian School.

Education soon lost her to the sail-

ing world and she made her hobby her profession – as a sailmaker. She has been working for the same firm, Noland Yachting, for 18 years and is the production manager.

Getting time off work to jaunt across the Atlantic in African Renaissance is not a problem. Her bosses, she says, "are just as crazy about sailing as I am". Company head Shane Noland has initiated a project to raise funds for the Thabo Mbeki Crossroads Education Fund.

Marion has been a competitive skipper for the past 12 years and performed well in numerous regattas.

Of their chances for the race, she says: "I have not been in the best of health but I am fit, doing well and ready. The crew members are fantastic and experienced sailors who all have great depth. There is no reason why we can't do well."

Crew member Gail Macarthur was Marion's navigator onboard Kelly Girl in 1996. The man who built the boat, Dryden Ambrose, is a crew member – which puts a smile on Marion's face, not that she needs assurance of the boat's condition.

While Marion puts time and effort



■ Skipper of the yacht African Renaissance, Marion Cole, relaxes on the yacht at the boat's christening by President Thabo Mbeki. Marion and her crew take on the 3600 mile MTN-Cape to Rio yacht race which starts in January.

into her own sailing, she contributes to sailing development by putting in extra hours on the sea as the coach of a young all-girl sailing team.

Although she has little spare time, she gives up what little she has on weekends to coach the team which is

led by Karima Jacobs, whose brother Sieraj is co-skippering the yacht Better Connection in the race.

Four of the team will be competing in the Cape to Rio, a sure sign of Marion's expert tuition paying off.

With the race just three weeks

away one has to back a person who has the ability to joke with the most powerful man in the country, President Mbeki, as if they had been friends for years. With confidence like that the Atlantic Ocean should be a pushover.