

Sons of the sea weigh up



Pat Reed and Jennifer, 20, raise their mugs to Bertie as Angela, 22, and Stanley, 13, grin approval.

BERTIE Reed's sun-dried skin cracked into a broad grin.

"Yes, I suppose the time has come for me to stop — short-handed sailing that is," he added quickly.

The gentleman of ocean racing, "Biltong Bertie", was at Bertie's Landing in the docks. He was sitting on a bench chatting with his wife Patsy and daughters Jennifer, Angelia and son Stanley. Another daughter, Pauline, could not make it.

"Oh no, quitting sailing is totally out of the question. I'll still do the Rothmans and the Algoa Bays and hopefully in time we'll be going back to Rio and Uruguay and even the Admiral's Cup."

Between gulps of beer, Bertie greeted and shook hands with friends passing in and out of the pub.

Grandmaster of sailing

After 27 years before the mast the grandmaster of international racing and one of South Africa's best ambassadors, was calling it a day.

But there is still lots of life in the dark-eyed mariner as he tells me he is looking forward to the finish of the BOC round the world race.

"Then I'll be involved in my sailing academy. I would really like to find some youngster who has the makings of a solo sailor and coach and manage him."

For Bertie, the "new South Africa" is what it is all about.

Bertie to trim his sails for a new life close to home

"We have been isolated from international sport for so long and I believe South African yachtsmen are set to play an even bigger role in the future — we have fantastic potential here," he said.

One of the challenges facing Bertie is to encourage black South Africans to become involved in sailing.

"I believe every white South African should be helping to educate black South Africans in fields we are good at. I am good at sailing so this is where I believe I can help."

Bertie paused to sip his beer.

"We can only build a better country through education and sailing is one of the best forms of education you can get because you continually meet so many people from so many walks of life."

He explained that although sailing might have been the sport of the rich in days gone by, today it captured the imagination of the man in the street.

"Thousands of people all over the world, youngsters, oldies, poor and the rich, all enjoy the sea and sailing. It brings people together for a common purpose," he said.

Phenomenal support

But there were still two legs of one of the world's most demanding races to complete and what did he think of his chances?

Ever honest, Bertie said immediately:

"Look here I had hoped to go out on a good note. I have had phenomenal support from Grinaker and, of course, my family," he gave his wife a smile, "but although the boat is fast we have had too many teething problems."

What Bertie will have to face and which will be his greatest handicap is to keep sailing knowing he has no chance of winning the BOC race overall.

"This is really out of the question now. If anyone says Reed can win, he is dreaming!"

Bertie, with so many thousands of sea miles of hard sailing under his belt, knows what he is talking about.

"Philippe Jeantot is three days behind and when we chatted in Sydney after the race, he told me even three days was too much and there I am three days behind," he said.

He stared at me, his black eyes serious.

"But it would be very very nice to win both even one of the remaining legs. Listen, I am sucking this out of my thumb, Grinaker is very good and I know I can be up there with the top guys, but the yachts are so competitive and so close matched that even the smallest mistake hampers you very hard."

Patsy and the children have been sitting quietly listening to the rugged sailor who has spent much of their lives away from home, but the closeness of the family is unmistakable.

I ask Patsy what she thinks about Bertie's end of his short-handed sailing career.

"I suppose it's about time — don't you think?" she said with a broad smile and the whole family laughed.