

Natal Fever

Patrick
Compton



Single climax missing

I HATE to say it, but nearly-round-the-world yachtsman Anthony Steward is becoming a bit of a bore.

I say this because, obviously, his feat of almost circumnavigating the world in 5,8m open boat is a remarkable achievement. In fact, I will never be able to appreciate just how remarkable, being a sailing ignoramus myself.

My first, and last, experience of sailing was going solo at St Mawes off the coast of Cornwall when I was about 11 years old. My fumbling efforts directed the boat in a perfect line towards the nearby rocks. Somehow, the tide took me away from them. It was not an auspicious debut.

No, my beef has nothing to do with sailing as such, rather with the natural laws of drama.

It all started with Steward's three-month rest in Durban from Christmas 1991 to March last year while he sat out the Aussie hurricane season. This was followed by his enforced return in August after being shipwrecked in the Seychelles; then his Christmas visit after landing in Richards Bay and then another visit this month on the final leg to Cape Town.

During all these sojourns he has received splash coverage, prompted, no doubt, by the desire of his sponsors to squeeze as much publicity out of his dramatic adventures as possible.

Unfortunately, the effect is of Steward taking a series of curtain calls before the performance has been completed.

Furthermore, to make a slightly different point, when you run the Comrades, you are expected to complete it in one go. It's no good spending the night at Drummond and completing the race the next day.

Now yachties will say this is an unfair parallel. The Comrades and sailing round the world in an open boat are not the same thing. Absolutely true. The problem is that the laws of drama support the way the Comrades is run, or the way Sir Francis Chichester sailed alone around the world, or the way Hillary climbed Mount Everest: continuous efforts gradually leading up to a single climax.

Sadly, sailing round the world in an open boat, interrupted by frequent visits back home, doesn't create the kind of gradually accumulating excitement that Steward's efforts deserve.

No wonder the poor chap wants to get to get to Cape Town as quickly as possible.