

Yacht missing in Cape gale

By CHRIS BATEMAN and RENEE MOODIE
A SOUTH-EAST gale forced two sea rescues in False Bay at the weekend — and a major air search was launched early yesterday for a missing Durban yacht and its two-man crew.

Three air force aircraft spent most of yesterday searching a 500-square-mile area for Durban sailors Mr Robert Hare, 23, and Mr Richard Dallas, 38, on board the 7.5-metre yacht Seanuts. The search was called off at 6pm, but rescue officials said they would "review the situation" at first light today.

Giant swells and winds of up to 60 knots — almost twice gale force — overnight scattered a fleet of yachts racing from Mossel Bay to Simon's Town, damaging two and overturning the Seanuts, which was not a competitor in the race.

Early yesterday the search for the missing yacht was launched with two air force Albatrosses and a Dakota flying a search pattern from Robben Island to Danger Point and up to Cape Columbine on the West Coast.

Last communication

No sign of the missing boat could be found and by nightfall — after another day of strong winds and high seas — rescue teams were concerned that the Seanuts and its crew might have been in serious trouble.

Rescue volunteers said the last communication the missing pair had with Cape Town Radio was early on Saturday night, when they reported their boat overturned in gale-force winds.

Seanuts is registered at the Point Yacht Club and left Durban harbour on January 10.

The rescue co-ordinator at Southern Air Command, Colonel Ben Kriegler, said the Seanuts made radio contact a second time, with a foreign trawler, the Eben-Millik, about 4am yesterday.

The trawler gave its own position as 60 miles west of Cape Point.

Meanwhile the crew of the Polysius, one of 32 yachts which took part in the Agulhas Dias Race, praised rescuers who towed them out of danger off Cape Point on Saturday evening.

Piketberg civil engineer Mr Jeremy Luckin said his yacht's rudder broke seven miles east of Cape Point. An NSRI boat from Simon's Town rescued

them when the yacht was a mile away from land.

False Bay Yacht Club's safety officer, Mr John Thirlwell, said the fleet's arrival in record time from Mossel Bay early yesterday "caught us by surprise".

Across the bay, the navy yacht Southern Floe damaged its boom while trying to find the Polysius, said a senior crew member.

An NSRI boat was in their area and they had thought it "prudent" to ask for a tow in, he added.



RUDDERLESS BUT HAPPY . . . The crew of the Polysius (from left), Ken Bardsen, Anthony Allen, Joyce Luckin, Simon Pethic (with rudder) and Jeremy Luckin, in calmer waters in Simon's Town harbour yesterday.

Picture: ALAN TAYLOR