

# All set fair for Biltong Bertie

THE 45-year-old face washed by thousands of nautical miles of sea air, and slapped every now and then with salt water "after shave", lit up in anticipation, writes MARK SEIDEL.

The frown disappeared. Solo yachtsman Bertie "Biltong" Reed smiled.

He was well over the disappointment of limping home five weeks into the Globe Challenge on January 2 after his hi-tech yacht, Grinaker, gave auto-pilot trouble above speeds of 10 to 11 knots.

"This time," said veteran Reed, "the same mistakes won't occur. The sails are fine, the hull is sound and the steering problems have been solved. Grinaker is equipped to handle anything."

## Sophisticated

So the lessons were heeded. The rush job involved taking a plan conceived in a restaurant through the drawing board stage to the construction yard, fitting the 18.29m sloop with sophisticated electronics and after all that, launching her on the water.

The celebrations in front of 1 000 guests at the Victoria basin, tapping to a brass band and a Cape Coloured minstrel troupe, the "Beach Boys" guitar-riffing their way through "Daar kom die Grinaker" were premature, although nobody thought so at the time.

The sloop embraced her sea trials with affection and Bertie was on his way, negotiating 9 600km of Atlantic Ocean to meet the 45-day arrival-in-port deadline before the start of the Globe Challenge last November 26.

Only at New Year did hidden problems manifest themselves and Biltong Bertie, very much against his never-say-die character, was forced to abort the mission.

As he gears himself for the March 30 start of the **Dias race** to the Azores, a crewed journey with Bertie at the helm, which will serve as a sea-trial run to check Grinaker, Reed reflected on his most recent mishap.

"It's important to do one's homework," he said at the "re-launch" of the boat in Johannesburg this week. "You can't do it under water in freezing cold conditions in darkness. You would last about 10 minutes.

"Our checks and balances were slightly out. We overlooked a small detail and paid the price."

But Reid's conviction spans the length of his mast — and the hundreds of thousands of nautical miles sailed during his illustrious career.

A little hiccup in the dead of night in roaring seas which were not quite a hurricane — "I've never experienced one and hope I never do" — has not dampened Reed's enthusiasm for more lonely sea trails.

After the Dias race, Reed will head for Plymouth and the start of the double-handed transatlantic race in June — and then circumnavigate the world in the 1990/91 BOC Challenge in September.

Reed's greed for the sea, and the challenges and unknowns it offers, shows little sign of abating.

Retirement? Out of the question. It was one topic not discussed. One look at his schedule provided the answer.



LONE South African yachtsman Bertie Reed contemplates a busy year ahead