

Autissier snatched from jaws of death

Washington - Italian skipper Giovanni Soldini, who rescued Isabelle Autissier from her shipwrecked yacht told race officials that all was well and he was resuming course for Cape Horn.

Soldini said he managed to rescue Autissier from her upturned yacht only after he threw a hammer at the boat, a race spokesman said.

Guided there by satellite beacons Soldini made two close passes yelling for Autissier. On the third pass, he threw a



Autissier

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To page 4



REUTERS

Rescue: yachtsman Givoanni Soldini threw a hammer at Isabelle Autissier's boat to wake her

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From page 1

hammer and Autissier responded by opening the escape hatch on the upturned yacht.

"She had been sleeping," said a race official.

"Doing well in good seas," Soldini told race officials in South Carolina by satellite telephone yesterday.

He said that he and Autissier were enjoying a cheese-and-wine party on his yacht to celebrate her rescue.

Autissier, leading the Around Alone yacht race, capsized in the Southern Ocean, sparking a dramatic rescue operation by Soldini, a fellow solo sailor.

Autissier told officials her boat had been knocked down in 20 knots of wind "after an (unexpected lurch) due to a problem with the boat's autopilot", said spokesman Eric Coquerel.

"What is surprising and what Isabelle still didn't understand this evening was that the boat rapidly overturned (to a full inverted position) and stayed that way," he said.

"When Gio threw a hammer at the hull to let Isabelle know she could come out, she exited the escape hatch built into the boat's transom," Coquerel added.

On Monday her distress beacons went off, giving her position as about 3 500km south of Rapa Nui or Easter Island, inside Chile's search-and-rescue area.

Her position put her just 800km away from the world's most distant point from land - and in an area of ocean five million square kilometres



Isabelle Autissier: found asleep at sea

larger than Russia.

Autissier was the race's overall leader when the fleet departed from Auckland bound for Punta del Este on February 6. She was in second place early on Monday before the incident happened.

There have been two southern ocean rescues of competitors by other competitors in previous Around Alone races.

In 1982-83, English skipper Richard Broadhead plucked Frenchman Jacques de Roux from his dismasted, holed vessel.

In 1990-1991, South African Bertie Reed took countryman John Martin off his boat after it had been rolled and suffered keel damage. - Sapa-AFP