

# Plain sailing for local 'yachties'

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This year's Round The Island yacht race at the Vaal Dam saw more than 400 entries, crewed by 1 500 sailors.

This year the event celebrated the 47th race and is reputed to be one of the biggest inland yacht races in the world. "It is the sailing equivalent of the Comrades Marathon or the Cape Argus Cycle Race," said Schweitzer.

"Competitors came from as far afield as Zimbabwe and Botswana," he added. "Sailors ranged from Springboks to 'yachties' who sail for the pure enjoyment of the sport."

The event consisted of a race around the largest of the islands in the middle of the dam. "With a strong wind, the event could take an hour to complete, but with no wind, it could take up to eight hours," Schweitzer said.

Competing against the famous America's Cup team, Shosholoza, sailing on a borrowed Thomson 7 yacht called Wild Monkey Dance, the 400 boats set out, jostling for the racing line, making for a bumpy, nerve-racking atmosphere.

At the blast of the gun, the fastest yachts took the lead with an eight-knot wind on their tails.

"Overcast and foggy, the 'Groot Island' was not easily visible and neither were low-lying islands, which posed a serious danger to boats," Schweitzer explained. Catching a good gust off the mainland, Nashua North surged forward and held her lead for two hours.

"We were slowed down by the threat of sandbanks, considering at 2,2 metres, our boat is the deepest of all keelboats." Constantly watching the depth monitor,

skipper Schweitzer, was forced to tack every few metres to avoid them, which could stop the boat dead in the water. Rounding the island, the seven-strong crew popped the huge spinnaker and ran for home.

Next around the island was the Springbok team of Shosholoza who took a risky decision to sail close to the mainland and hazardous islands.

Catching gusty wind from the land, the team caught up with Nashua North, which resulted in a neck-and-neck pursuit for the finish. After three hours of close sailing, Wild Monkey Dance pipped team Nashua North at the finish line by a mere 56 seconds to take the trophy, with Nashua North in second place. On overall handicap points, Nashua North finished fourth overall.



Team Nashua North in action during the Round The Island yacht race.



Christine Smith, Craig Schweitzer, Alex Schon, Anne Murphy, Ivan Smith and Wolf Seltz, celebrate their boat, Sticky Fingers