



BREATHTAKING: The yacht City of Cape Town crosses the finish line off Copacabana Beach yesterday morning, with four Capetonian and four young Brazilian crew on board. Only a thunderous performance from Ciao Bella in the next two days could steal their handicap win.

Picture: BRENTON GEACH

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City of Cape Town looks set for Rio handicap victory

Alex Petersen

GERRY HEGIE and his crew of four Capetonians and four Brazilians crossed the finish line of the Heineken Cape to Rio Race early yesterday, after a frustrating three-hour calm just short of the finish, to be the top contenders for the coveted South Atlantic Trophy, given to the winning boat on handicap.

As the City of Cape Town crossed the line, vuvuzelas blared from a large launch carrying family members and supporters of the four young Brazilian men on the crew, and two Brazilian TV teams.

The families cheered and waved furiously. Also on hand to greet the winning yacht was Brazil's top sailor, Olympic gold medallist, Torben Grael.

In the gentle morning breeze, the huge spinnaker in the City of Cape Town colours made a proud sight against the background of Sugar Loaf Mountain and a hazy Copacabana Beach.

But it had been touch and go for Hegie, 25, and his crew, Michael Robb, 29, Duncan Matthews, 25, and the four Brazilians, Samuel Goncalves, Alexandro Goncalves, Hallan

Batista and Allan Tavares.

About 1 000 miles from Rio, the solenoid on the main engine failed, and without power the water-maker was put out of action.

"We had emergency water, but we were down to four glasses of water each a day. It was tough, but all the guys were disciplined, but we had to cool down our work rate.

"I also had to be careful to

conserve the power on the sat-phone, so that we would not get penalised for not reporting in."

All the young crew looked exuberant at their achievement at maintaining a handicap lead position.

Only a highly exceptional performance in the next two days from Ciao Bella, currently placed second on handicap, could push City of Cape Town from its top place.