

Big splash for America's Cup challenger

AUCKLAND. — Michael Fay gazed at his new America's Cup yacht New Zealand and smiled a satisfied smile.

The 27-metre waterline challenger for yachting's biggest prize is to be officially launched on Sunday with much pomp and ceremony.

However, there was little ceremony this week as Fay inspected the boat along with New Zealand's Governor-General, Sir Peter Reece.

Stripped to waist

Fay, a merchant banker, arrived in a tiny tender from his offices across Auckland harbour, took off his jacket and began looking closely at the progress that has been made on the boat.

The crew, many stripped to the waist, all but ignored their boss and continued working industriously.

The yacht, which was built in 24 weeks, is to sail against the San Diego Yacht Club's defender in a one-on-one series for the cup off the California coast in September.

"You forget the magnitude of this sometimes," said Fay, as he stared at the huge mast.

Auckland, often called the "city of sails" because of its natives' love of sailing, is preparing a huge party to celebrate the official launching of New Zealand.

The launch festivities will feature a run expected to attract 50 000 contestants and a one-hour ceremony that will be televised live in New Zealand, Australia and the United States, officials said.

Fay's last Cup challenger, Kiwi Magic, lost to Dennis Conner's San Diego Yacht Club entry Stars and Stripes in the challenger finals off Fremantle, Australia, last year.

A salamanazar, a nine-litre bottle of champagne, will be used to christen the boat.

Thousand of small craft are expected to dot Auckland har-



bour for the launch, while jazz bands are to play at the quay. Also planned are aerobic displays and traditional New Zealand Maori war dances.

The New Zealand, constructed of a carbon compound used in the aerospace industry, weighs about the same as a traditional 12-metre class America's Cup yacht, but has three times the surface area.

Conner went on to win the cup from Australian defender Kookaburra III.

Early defense

Fay's Mercury Bay Boating Club forced the SDYC into an early defense of the cup with a legal challenge based on a literal interpretation of the Deed of Gift, a 100-year-old document that governs the competition.

A US court ruled last year in favour of Fay's challenge for a big boat competition in 1988, scuttling plans for a 1991 regatta in 12-metre yachts, the class that has been used to decide the America's Cup for the past 36 years.

Conner will defend the Cup, but plans to use a multi-hull yacht, which Fay claims is against the rules.

The SDYC and its manager, the Sail America Foundation, also angered Fay when they rejected Fay's plan to postpone the defence until 1989 and throw it open to all challengers.

Members of the SDYC, however, will be in Auckland for the launching of the New Zealand, including club commodore Doug Alford, cup defense committee chairman Gerry Driscoll and Sail America design project manager John Marshall. — Sapa-AP