

Safety goes to hull . . .

THE Dias Race to Lisbon, which sets out from Table Bay on March 31, is the big talking point in Cape yacht club bars.

One of the main topics of discussion is the inclusion, for the first time, of multihull yachts in a South African ocean race.

The controversy over monohulls (yachts with a single hull) and multihulls (yachts with two or three hulls) has raged for years.

Although multihulls have been tried and tested for years overseas, they somehow have not taken off here — unless you consider the Hobiecats, which are found on every navigable stretch of water.

TRIMARANS and catamarans are extremely fast downwind, when their slim hulls offer very little water resistance. Because they are so wide, they also offer vast amounts of accommodation for cruising people.

They are very popular in the Mediterranean and Caribbean as luxury charter yachts. Unfortunately, our coast does not

offer the same protected sailing conditions, so there are just a handful of seagoing multihulls tied up at our marinas.

Most local sailors have a rather negative attitude to the virtues of the multihull vessels. We've all seen the popular Hobie catamarans racing across Fish Hoek bay and Hout Bay. They are fun and fast — and they tip over regularly.

Large catamarans must be carefully designed to avoid a similar fate. There could be few things more frightening than tipping over and not being able to right a large boat at sea.

Monohulls can also roll right over in ex-

treme conditions, but their pendulum keels, which are usually heavily weighted with lead or cast iron, should pull them upright again. It's a comforting thought when one approaches stormy conditions.

It is virtually impossible to right an upturned trimaran. They certainly don't right themselves.

HAVING said that, the confirmed multihull sailors assure me that their craft are as safe as houses. They say their boats are more stable than their single-hulled sisters as a multihull has a far wider beam. They offer more comfort and certainly more speed in all conditions — except



when sailing very close into the wind. Catamaran sailing is exciting to watch. The added speed gives it far more spectator appeal.

Yet for all their speed and stability, multihulls are regarded with suspicion in South Africa.

I HAVE spoken to many yachtsmen on the subject and all have said they would rather cross the ocean on a monohull than a multihull. They add, though, that for sheer speed and excitement, they would love to race a catamaran locally.

Although there are many scary sea stories about catamarans turning over and drifting in mid-ocean, with their crews struggling to survive, we also have frightening stories about so-called "safe" monohull yachts that simply vanish at sea, leaving crews drifting in liferafts.

Maybe we simply do not know enough about multihulls here to form an unbiased opinion. In years to come I'm sure we will see more and more ocean-going cats and trimarans being built for local conditions.

Our coastline is known as one of the toughest in the world for sailors. Who knows, we might even produce the safest multihulls afloat.