

DAVE'S BEAT



Bombs in bags and a hotel of discontent

NOW I have an idea of how Mike Gatting and Co felt on their recent demoralised tour.

I had just checked in to a leading Cape Town hotel a few days ago when about 150 hotel workers, protesting against unfair dismissals, went on a silent, double circumnavigation of the foyer.

I watched, moving about two metres away from my overnight bag in the process. Suddenly, there was a strident shout. "Whose bag is this?"

I owned up — hell, there was no one else standing near the thing — and a lady hotel staffer almost snarled: "Well, I suggest you move it unless you want it blown up!"

I, as a South African, understood what she meant, even if I didn't approve of her approach. But I hate to think what effect both the remark and attitude might have had on an overseas tourist.

At dinner that night the protesters filed quietly through the dining area. A German couple at an adjacent table were nonplussed. Their interest quickened when the demos started singing. The fraulein said in broken English to her partner: "Fantastic. I wonder if zey are going also to dance."

The lady looked disappointed when the group dispersed, ending what she seemed to think was some sort of dinner cabaret.



But all that is just by the by. The reason for the Cape trip, courtesy of SAA, was to see and sail the rejuvenated Voortrekker II which is being sponsored by the national airline in the upcoming Bartolomeu Dias Cape to Lisbon yacht race.

On sail day there was no wind and Table Bay, like a reluctant early morning riser, seemed a little loath to shrug off the blanket of grey mist and greet the new day.

But by the time the press party got to the yacht basin, Table Bay was going about its business, and Voortrekker II, basking in the sunlight, looked splendid in her new colours.

Out we went, with skipper Hanno Teuteberg and his young Defence Force crew on a sea as glassy as a window pane. The wind would hardly have blown out a candle. Yet, effortlessly, the nine-year-old Voortrekker II glided to six knots, even nine in the occasional puff. Robben Island slid by and all too soon, with the beautiful blue, orange and white "bag" (spinnaker) up, the "Flying Springbok" was loping home, sweeping close by a fleet of small fishing craft.

"If one of those comes hurtling after us it just means his lines have been caught in our prop," said Teuteberg.

Docking, he was as fussy as a father with a new-born babe. "Easy does it. Careful! Not so far forward. Pull in that line. Are we too close. Hell, I don't want to scratch the paintwork before we even get into the race."

Those two little incidents perhaps illustrated the sort of man it is who will be in charge of attempting to add to the honours collected by South Africa's most famous yacht. A sense of humour and responsibility are prime requisites for leadership in a 6 000-mile race that could take about six weeks. And the impression after the day's sail was that Voortrekker II has the class, and her crew the proficiency, to be first over the line in Lisbon.

— DAVE BEATTIE