

French skipper wins BOC in record time

NEWPORT. — Christophe Auguin, French skipper of Groupe Sceta, has been confirmed the winner of the BOC Challenge, the 27 000-miles round-the-world yacht race for solo skippers.

The only threat to the triumph of Auguin (31) was posed by his compatriot Alain Gautier, sailing Generali Concorde.

Gautier began the final stage of the race from Punta del Este on March 30 with a 2½ hour advantage. To be the overall winner, he needed to finish before 4.37 am (SA time) yesterday after Auguin completed the final leg at 6.11 am Tuesday.

To win the \$100 000 first prize Gautier had to cross the finish line at 4.37 am (SA time). But as the deadline passed the 28-year-old sailor, his 20-metre yacht crippled by

thrashing winds, was 100 miles away and expected to finish no earlier than 9.30 pm (SA time) yesterday.

Ironically, a storm which only briefly imperilled Auguin — submerging his mainsail for the first time in more than three months at sea but also propelling his Groupe Sceta yacht to speeds of 12 knots — shredded Gautier's sails.

Battling winds which at times approached 50 knots, Gautier suffered a torn mainsail as Auguin crossed the finish line near the picturesque former whaling village which now lays claim to being the yachting capital of the world.

Gautier also suffered a torn spinnaker and save for one-hour respites Monday night and in the early hours of Tuesday, his Generali Concorde was virtually becalmed.

Less than 22 hours earlier Gautier was estimated to follow Auguin to the finish a scant 53 minutes too late to win — at 5.30 am (SA time) on Tuesday — a tantalising finish all the more dramatic for a race which covered 27 000 miles.

Auguin is the second French winner of the race, which was won in its

inaugural year by Philippe Jeantot and Credit Agricola and in 1988 by Jeantot with his new Credit Agricola III.

Auguin established a record for the race, finishing in 120 days, 22 hours, 36 minutes, 35 seconds. He improved the old mark by 13 days, 6 hours, 47 minutes, 21 seconds. — Sapa-Reuter.