



CAPE TOWN COMEBACK? ... Whitbread race officials say Cape Town could once again be on the stop-over list for the next race, in 1998. To compete, the country will have to build a water-ballasted W-60, such as the Spanish entry Galicia 93 Pescanova (above), as amended race rules means the highly successful design will be the only class in the 1998 race.

Kiwis show the way for South African yachting

BARRING civil war or a major economic collapse in South Africa, the Whitbread fleet will almost certainly stop over in Cape Town during the next 32 000-mile round-the-world yacht race in 1998.

The big question is: will South Africa rise to the occasion and have an entry in the race? And if not, then what course is South African sailing steering towards top international competition?

For years, local sailors have marvelled at the dynamic yachting capability of New Zealand, a country smaller in population, size and gross domestic product than South Africa, but boasting the dynamic skills of Bruce Farr, designer of their America's Cup boats as well as three highly competitive entries in the current Whitbread race.

Yamaha, skippered by Ross Field, is right now winning the W-60 class on the fifth leg from Punta del Este, Uruguay, to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, while New Zealand Endeavour (Grant Dalton) is the overall leader of the maxi class.

Chris Dickson, skipper of the New Zealand/Japanese entry, Tokio, effectively threw in the towel this week after the yacht's rigging had collapsed.

He sent a patriotic message to Yamaha: "It's all yours, boys. It's up to you to beat the Europeans", a distinct reference to Lawrie Smith's European Economic Community W-60, Intrum Justitia.

John Martin, a "reborn yachtsman" last week after having clinched a deal which will allow him to sail South Africa's yachting flagship, Broomstick, in the Sydney-to-Hobart race Down Under in December, made no secret of his ambition to skipper a local entry in the next Whitbread race — subject to "the economy doing an about-turn".

There was much debate at the HB Car Hire Admiral's Cup about what a South African entry would cost. Whitbread press releases put the figure to take part this year at R12-million, but top yachtsmen Rob Sharp and Henry Hiddes, who crewed on Padda Kuttel's Whitbread yacht Atlantic Privateer, said that this amount would only "take you around the course". They estimate that it would cost anywhere between R25-million and R40-million to mount a potentially winning campaign.

One of the chief strengths of New Zealand yachting is that the industry and the sailors have put their competitiveness aside and rallied together in favour of hugely successful international campaigns. The outcome of that co-operation is that there is only one winner: New Zealand.

Sharp points out that Dickson and Dalton are bitter rivals — every bit as much as Geoff Meek and Martin, who would make ideal co-skippers of a South African Whitbread race entry.

However, he failed to mention that the two can afford to be at loggerheads without the slightest detriment to their country's aspirations as both are skippers of New Zealand boats.

In comparison to the Kiwis, South Africa would only be able to enter one Whitbread boat.

But local sailing is in disarray, with the industry divided and yacht clubs characterised by rival camps. Competitors on the water won't even have an after-race drink with one another, let alone pool their resources and work together.

To launch an international Whitbread, America's Cup or Admiral's Cup campaign flying the South African flag would also require the organisational ability of a dynamic visionary, someone like Raymond Ackerman or Sol Kerzner.

South Africa will, for the first time in history, not have a potentially winning entry in the BOC Challenge in September. And to mount a Whitbread campaign, the country has two years to get the ball rolling and would do well to heed the lessons of motor-racing in this country.

Just 14 years ago, South Africa boasted Jody Shekter, the Formula One world champion. Today, the country would dearly love merely to have a driver in a Formula One car. Will South African yachting go the same way?

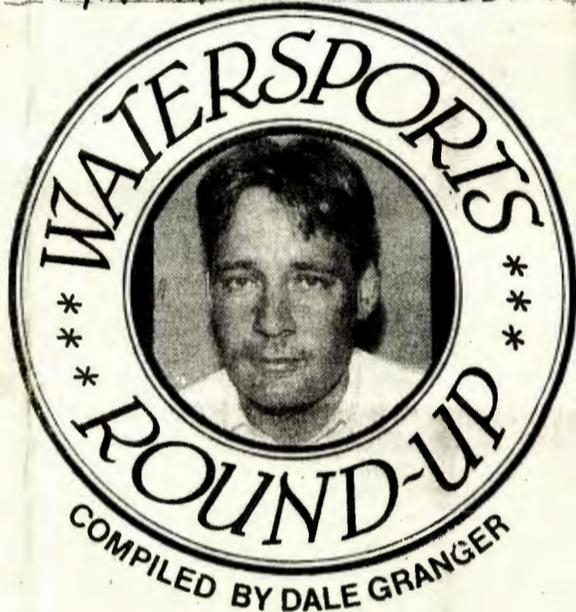
SMALL one-metre surf off-shore at Muizenberg wasn't ideal for surfing legend Shaun Thomson at the Spur Steak Ranches Benefit Classic.

However, the occasion brought the surfing community together last Saturday to raise funds for the national team to travel to Brazil for the amateur world championships next month and drew wide-ranging support from national companies.

Thomson, more adept at big-wave riding, placed seventh as Camps Bay's Justin Strong produced an

20/1/1998

CAPE TIMES



outstanding small-wave performance to outpoint Cass Collier of Lotus River to win the Open division. Amateurs Trevor Stuart and Sean Jerram took third and fourth place respectively.

The junior final was a more closely contested affair, and Chad Kushner of Sea Point just shaded Strand's Mickey Duffus. Gavin Moir and Nick Hough won the masters and veterans title respectively.

Former South African champion Angela Hoy of Scarborough made a welcome return to competition by winning the women's division from world wave-ski champion Tracy Sassen.

In the celebrity stakes, Robin Auld, better known as a musician than a surfer, but highly capable in the tube at Kalk Bay reef, outclassed Mike Gilham, national judge Colin Fitch and Western Province rugby captain Andrew Paterson.

Gigs Cilliers of Amanzimtoti took the kneeboard division from Sean Noon of Sea Point.

THIRTY-knot north-westerly winds and choppy seas are hardly conducive to safe off-shore powerboat racing. So, understandably, last Saturday's off-shore powerboat and ski racing were cancelled. The organisers hope to stage the events this weekend.

An estimated 50 entries have been received, including about 38 rubber ducks, but the big draw-cards will be the out-and-out off-shore racing teams with their high-powered boats.

In the last race a month ago, Julian Craig and Nico Bester barrel-rolled their outfit in a spectacular nose dive right in front of the spectators. Both landed up in hospital, but recovered quickly and are in the line-up for this weekend.

The best vantage points will be the Oceana and the Victoria & Alfred breakwaters.

THE great challenge of the annual Cannon Dive is almost with us again. Members of the public are welcome to come and watch teams of divers compete to see who can lift a 300-kg concrete cannon to the surface, race it around a series of floats and replace it on the sea bed.

The date for this year's event is May 29, and the venue is the area is the beach next to Simon's Town Station. The entry fee for a team of five is R100, and entry forms are available from Alex Papayanni at tel 72-2776 (home) or 932-6457 (work).

There is no limit to how many divers may use scuba at the event. The lift bag and rope will be supplied, and no extra rope may be used at all. All dive bottles must have a DV in position.

TWO events are on the calendar at the False Bay Underwater Club tonight.

At 9 pm, Dr Roy Mellville Smith of the Sea Fisheries Research Institute will talk about crayfish, how threatened the species is or is not and how the quota system is worked out, relating particularly to the sports diver. All are welcome.

Tonight is also sign-on night for the club's new two-star course.