



Lasers approach the starting line for one of the weekend races at East London.

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EL DAILY DESPATCH

Picture by Oliver Wright

Rough seas test laser sailors in nationals

from JEREMY REDDING

EAST LONDON — The weekend Gestetner Laser National Championship off East London provided some exciting sailing for the 77 sailors, most of whom are not used to open sea conditions.

After the strong easterly wind and wild seas kept the boats off the water on Thursday, a good 15 to 20-knot westerly came through on Friday afternoon.

The westerly returned again on Saturday and Sunday and, with four-metre swells, provided exciting and physically testing sailing.

Six races were sailed, the greatest test being on Saturday when the boats stayed out for over four hours in cold rough conditions, with the wind gusting to 25 knots, to complete three races. Only 26 boats completed the third race and several were towed in with breakages or with crews too exhausted to continue.

The Laser is the best

boat in which the open sailing competition will take place at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. So this was an important event for South Africa's Olympic hopefuls.

Foremost among these was Dave Hibberd of Point Yacht Club in Durban. He was generally in the lead from the first mark and won all six races with apparent ease. He was followed by Peter Shaw of Zeekoeivlei and Michael Giles of Redhouse, Port Elizabeth.

Despite the physically taxing nature of Laser sailing, the fleet was liberally sprinkled with young as well as older sailors. There were 8 Grand Master entries, over 60 years old, the oldest being Alf Johnson of Redhouse Yacht Club. This section was won by Ken Holiday of Zeekoeivlei. Holiday came 22nd overall, in the process beating many younger than himself.

At this stage the final selection was made for the Youth team to represent South Africa in the World Youth Cham-

pionships in Bermuda in July. The winner of the Youth Boys section was Timothy Korving of Point Yacht Club, followed by Charles Nankin of Zeekoeivlei. Korving did well to come 13th overall. He was selected to the Youth team.

The Youth girls sailed Laser Radials, and Robyn Keen sailed exceptionally well to gain for herself a place in the Youth team, by winning this class overall.

The Laser Two is the two-up Olympic Youth class. The fleet of Laser Twos was small but very competitive. All six sailors having represented South Africa in the Optimistic class recently. The winners, Roger Hudson and his crewman Bruce Keen of Zeekoeivlei, will be joining the Youth team in Bermuda.

The next national championship for the Laser class will probably be held at Club Mykonos, Saldanha Bay, where it is hoped the 1996 world championship will be staged.