

Solo yachtsman tugged to safety

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IAN SHIFFMAN Shipping Correspondent

A SOLO yachtsman who sailed from Cape Town to South America has been forced by a storm to abandon the voyage just 70 nautical miles from Cape Town on the return leg.

Former Pretoria lawyer Albert Coetzee called Cape Town Radio for help, asking to be towed in.

The lone yachtsman had sailed about 8 000 nautical miles and was almost in sight of land when he was struck by a violent storm.

The craft was being buffeted by huge seas and gale-force winds drove the vessel another 80 nautical miles west.

Out of range for the NSRI rescue craft, Godfrey Needham of Pentow Marine was contacted and the tug Kuswag 4 sent to take the yacht in tow.

Coetzee sailed from Cape Town with his L-36 yacht Argyl on a solo voyage to South America last December.

After a good sail to the island of St Helena, he hit two violent storms near Trinidad and off the Brazilian coast. After making temporary repairs,

he limped to Punta del Este.

Nearing the port he was nearly sunk by a fast-moving fishing trawler and alerted the vessel's skipper only by turning on all lights.

Describing the anti-climax of abandoning the South Atlantic voyage, Coetzee said Argyl had taken a severe beating in several storms and that when the final gale hit about 70 sea miles from Cape Town, it left the yacht with damage that could not be repaired at sea.

The engine had seized, the Genoa sail was shredded and the plug of the mainsail had snapped off.

"Monstrous seas built up by the 50-knot gale were crashing over the yacht and I decided to call Cape Town Radio for assistance," he said.

Pentow Marine's Kuswag 4 battled for about three hours to connect a line in high seas, colliding with the yacht twice.

Coetzee, who compares solo sailing to some of the other risky sports he enjoys, including hang-gliding and parachuting, said he would tackle another voyage.

Picture: IAN SHIFFMAN, The Argus.

RESCUED: Albert Coetzee with his yacht Argyl.