

Provoyeur set to maintain proud tradition

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INTREPID South African yachtsman J J Provoyeur has just under 1 500 miles left to sail in the BOC Challenge single-handed around-the-world yacht race but has almost become the forgotten man of sailing — courtesy of wretched luck with the weather on the final 7 000-mile stretch and his resultant relegation to fifth position in class 1.

It would be easy for South Africans to forget where Provoyeur has come from in just over a year, as an initially unsponsored sailor who had only sailed alone to Dassen Island and back — thrown at the mercy of the seas in arguably the world's toughest sporting endurance event, where only 12 of the original 21 starters who set out remain, with two boats lost at sea and one competitor presumed dead.

But as Provoyeur sets course for the Gulf Stream, which will sweep him to Charleston, United States, where the gruelling 27 000 mile-race commenced seven months ago, he deserves the accolades of achieving his goal of becoming the first man to circumnavigate the

globe alone with the new South African flag — made more remarkable with the devastating efficiency of a successful campaign which takes years of preparation but was launched only months ago, fulfilling his prediction that when it is all over "my rivals will know that I've been there".

It's easy to forget the early battle he fought with star female French sailor Isabelle Autissier for the lead through the doldrums on the first leg to Cape Town in a David vs Goliath contest — with Provoyeur's antiquated eight-year-old boat Novell SA squaring up against Ecureuil Poitou Charentes 2. The latter is a modern fourth-generation racing machine backed with a multi-million dollar sponsor which was lost on the second leg in the Southern Ocean when Autissier's dreams of victory were shattered.

There was battle for a last-minute sponsor in Cape Town, which kept Provoyeur in the race, and the glowing tribute from race leader and French sailing star Christophe Auguin in Punta for del Este, who called the Capeton-



ian an unsung hero for his dogged determination and fighting spirit.

The performance of American David Scully on Coyote on the final leg has been the chief catalyst in Provoyeur's dropping to fifth position — but it's taken the former ski-racer over 20 000 miles to show the mettle of his new state-of-the-art racer, which Auguin rates as second only to his own, Sceta Calberson, and as fast in certain conditions and only three per cent slower in others.

Provoyeur, however, is on the verge of maintaining the country's

sailing heritage of having a finisher in all four BOC races..

★★★★★

NEW ZEALAND'S performance of qualifying for the America's Cup finals off San Diego for the first time in 144 years has sent the Kiwis into a yachting frenzy.

In the smallest country to qualify for the grand finale of yachting's biggest prize, with a population of only 3.5 million, it is proving to be the popular choice among sailing fans.

★★★★★

BOTH Formula 1 powerboat pilot Renier Engelbrecht and a spectator are lucky to be alive after a terrifying 200km/h crash at Port Alfred at the weekend.

It again served to highlight the dangers involved in the sport which can claim to be the most dangerous in South Africa.

On lap 22 of the 35-lap race on Saturday, Engelbrecht's accelerator stuck at full speed and he slammed into a stone marina wall at full

force with only the boat's "written off" safety cell saving the young rising star.

Spectator Mrs Johanna Verwey was struck by flying debris and both casualties were stabilised and treated for shock with Engelbrecht rushed to hospital with injuries to his neck and right leg.

In the restart, Terry Moore, racing with a fractured wrist incurred in a crash three weeks ago, flew away from Lindenberg with Kevin Smith third and Ian Mather fourth.

★★★★★

IT will be an emotional moment for Border surfer Brett Corby when he paddles out at Nahoon Reef, East London, in the SA National Surfing Championships tomorrow at the scene where his brother, Bruce, lost his life in a shark attack last year.

The WP squad will defend their title, but word in the surfing world is that they will find Border, Eastern Province, and a stung Natal, having their worst contest year in surfing, tough customers.