

World's top laser sailers in Cape Town for Olympic warm-up

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Staff Reporter

SAILING a fleet of 135 brand new lasers in the colours of race sponsor BP, the Laser World Championships in False Bay sees the coming together of the world's top laser sailers for the first time this year and an early opportunity to select the favourites for the Atlanta Olympic Games.

Nineteen of the 20 ranked sailors in the world are among the fleet for what has been billed as the most competitive Laser World Championships to date.

The sport of laser sailing is relatively new and the first boats were imported to South Africa in the early 1970s. The craft's popularity has spread throughout the world and is regarded as the perfect training craft for up-and-coming sailors.

The international popularity of the craft is reflected in the countries participating. Among the "traditional" sailing countries such as USA, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, there are also sailors from Angola, Tanzania, Turkey, Croatia and Qatar.

In order to stage the world championships, the organising committee undertook the importation of 140 new craft. A local sailing store undertook to finance the project and then retail the "second hand" boats. To date more than 110 have been sold.

With all the competitors come all the officials. With officials comes influence and a World Council meeting is due for next week in Simon's Town.

To date, the visiting officials are impressed with the facilities and the general organisation, which augurs well for the Cape Town 2004 Bid.

The world championship continues until Tuesday and will be followed by the Laser World Radial Championship and World Masters Championships.



BATTLE: International competitors do battle as they fight for advantage in this week's world championships.

IDEAL: Centre, dozens of sails dotted False Bay in ideal conditions as the Laser World Championships got underway this week.

SKILL: Right, the emphasis is on skill as 135 Laser sailors from around the world give their best.



Pictures: BRENTON GEACH, Staff Photographer.