



CRAMPED: Volunteer crew-members on the 14 yachts competing in the BT Global Challenge have paid R131 250 to sail the world's toughest race and harshest oceans. London-based public relations officer Andrea Bacon and stowaway Floppy the rabbit make the most of spartan living conditions.

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PICTURE: GARTH STEAD

Soggy bedding, 'nappy rash' for yachtie

LISA TEMPLETON 10/4/1997

THERE is more to sailing than sunny bays and iced sundowners — the reality is wild seas with 17-metre waves, two showers in five weeks, monotonous dehydrated foods, soggy bedding and "nappy rash".

So volunteer crew member Ms Andrea Bacon, 28, has discovered as she sails the BT Global Challenge, the world's toughest yacht race around the world — the wrong way, against the prevailing winds and currents.

Only the skippers of the 14 identical 22-metre steel yachts are professional sailors. Their crews are made up of volunteers who were selected from hundreds of applicants for their guts and determination and who pay R131 250 for

their berth. Many had never sailed before.

Bacon, a London-based public relations officer, was one of the exhausted but elated crew-members on Group 4, which sailed into the Waterfront in the early hours of yesterday morning to win the Sydney to Cape Town leg across the notoriously wild Southern Ocean.

"I had sailed dinghies before but never done any racing on big yachts," Bacon grinned yesterday, as she chatted to the Cape Times amid leftover champagne and beer bottles on the deck of Group 4.

She looked remarkably good for having crossed the world's wildest ocean under spartan racing conditions.

"Our skipper, Mike Golding, is very strict about weight, so we have

one book each, one CD, three pairs of knickers, two pairs of socks and our sailing gear," she said.

However, Bacon has smuggled along a stowaway, a fluffy bunny called Floppy, which shares her tiny bunk — "the coffin" — in the cramped aft-cabin she shares with a crew member.

"The conditions at sea do not lend themselves to showering, the boat is at a constant 30-degree heel and you have to swing like a monkey from A to B, and even when you go to the toilet you have to hold on." She showered twice in the five-week leg and wore the same clothes day after day.

Her unfortunate crewmate, Ms Amanda Tristan, developed toothache mid-ocean and had to have a tooth removed by a fellow crew-member — a marine biologist

who had only injected a fish before.

"He removed the infected tooth in the galley. We could hear the yelps up on deck," Bacon giggled.

The most terrifying moment of the hairy trip was when the boat got knocked flat.

"I was flung across the galley and landed on my back looking at a cupboard which was now where the roof should be. There were CDs, video cameras and batteries flying past my face, and leftover chilli con carne and mashed potato everywhere.

"It was terrifying because I really thought we had hit an iceberg, and I knew how far away the nearest boat was and that there was no way we could survive."

The crew was split into two teams to do watches on deck.

Bacon was in charge of communication and trimming the spinnaker, which meant she had to brave the enormous waves which crashed over the foredeck. Times off watch were spent eating, sleeping and kitting up with warm clothes to go on deck, which took 25 minutes.

So what was the highlight of the trip? "Getting here," Bacon grinned, looking out over the Waterfront.

The yachts left England in September last year and have visited Rio de Janeiro, Wellington and Sydney. Group 4 has snatched up first position on three of the legs.

The yachts will be berthed in the new basin at the V&A Waterfront until they depart for Boston on May 4, and they are due back in England in July.