

British pair fastest of the fast

NORMAN SHERIFF

Charles Apthorp and Andy Weatherspoon of Britain yesterday proved they are the fastest human beings on the planet in a Flying Fifteen when the World Championships drew to a close offshore from Durban.

The pair out-smarted the rest of the 51-strong fleet of Flying Fifteens from seven countries in the seven races which make up the championship, hosted by the Royal Natal yacht club.

But it was a close thing.

Going into yesterday's final race, Apthorp and Weatherspoon were lying second overall to three-time defending world champions Steve Goacher and Phil Evans, also from Britain.

The other yachtsmen in with a chance of overall victory were Mike Hart and Chris Gowers from Britain and Grant Alderson and Dean McAully from Australia.

But, the pressure was on Goacher and Evans as the overall lead they held was slender, especially as they were disqualified in the first race last Sunday for having their bows over the line at the start.

The final race began in a 15-20-knot north easterly wind with a lumpy sea running.

With nerves on edge but sailing well, halfway up the first beat to windward Goacher and Evans had an incident with



AND AWAY THEY GO!: The international Flying Fifteen fleet gets underway off Durban yesterday

PICTURE: TREVOR C

Australians Ron Packer and Peter Mudford. This forced them to do two compulsory 360-degree turns to exonerate themselves, and from this incident, they never really recovered.

Back at the front, the fleet and the Irish team of Darren Martin

and Simon Murray led around the windward mark with a flotilla of determined yachts behind them.

On the second reach Packer and Mudford took the lead, but there was some determined cut-and-thrust tacking behind then

as Apthorp and Weatherspoon moved into second place with a desperate effort from Hart and Gowers just behind them.

The Aussies finished first with Apthorp and Weatherspoon holding off a strong challenge second and Hart and

Gowers third, Goacher and Evans, who were stuck in the pack for most of the race, finished 12th.

Apthorp and Weatherspoon, who are based at Hayling Island in the Isle of Wight, were first overall followed by Goacher and

Evans with Hart and Gowers third, making bit a one-two-three for Britain. Fourth were Grant Alderson and Dean McAully with Ron Packer and Peter Mudford fifth - all from Australia - with Alan Bax and Bill Masterman (UK) sixth.

Best performance from a South African Flying Fifteen this week came from the Durban team of Patrick Harris and Joe Boy, who finished 10th overall.

This was a sterling effort from the pair, who only took delivery of the yacht (a borrowed British yacht) a few days before the start of the regatta. Their best individual placing was a second on Friday.

The next Flying Fifteen World Championships will be held in 2003 in Ireland. The hosts will be the National Yacht Club from their base at Dun Laoghaire on Dublin Bay.

National Yacht Club spokesman Ken Dumbleton, who was competing here this week, said yesterday: "We are expecting at least 100 Modern Flying Fifteens and about 50 of the older Classic type.

"We have significantly improved our facilities, which include a massive platform with cranes so the yachts can be dry-sailed, and we have a new 600-berth marina that opens this year."

Will South Africa be there? "Definitely," said Patrick Harris.