

# THE DA GAMA YACHT RACE DRA

# Was this our Fastnet disaster?

## Skippers give near identical details of seas and winds

NOW that the search for the yacht Rubicon and her crew has been called off by the South African Air Force, the earlier claim that this year's Da Gama race was so disastrous that it might even be labelled South Africa's own Fastnet, gains more validity.

The Fastnet, of course, was Britain's yachting disaster of the century when in August, 1979, 17 people were drowned and 23 yachts were abandoned or sunk on a course which took the yachts from Southampton around the Fastnet rocks and back to Plymouth.

On the first leg of that 970 kilometre race from Cowes to the Fastnet rock in the Atlantic, the yachts ran into what was described as "abnormal" weather conditions and "viscous 15 metre vertical seas".

**Report: RICHARD COMPTON**  
**Graphic: GAIL SCHEEPEFS**

This description is almost identical with reports from yachtsmen who limped back to Durban over the weekend. In fact, if the comparison were to be scrutinised, it would probably come to light that wind speed and the size of swells were significantly greater off our coast than that experienced in the Fastnet.

This can largely be attributed to the 60-knot south-westerly winds blowing against the Mozambique current which, on that fateful Thursday night, was flowing at about three to four knots. The resulting swells were measured at more than 17 metres at the peak of the storm.

A certain amount of criticism has almost inevitably been levelled at race organiser

Bob Fraser, who started the second leg of the race on Thursday aware that winds could reach 35 knots. Yet this is an acceptable wind speed for all those ocean-going competitors.

The fact that winds reached 60 knots only an hour after a gale warning (30 knots or more) was given at 1903 hours (7pm) on Thursday, was a freak of nature.

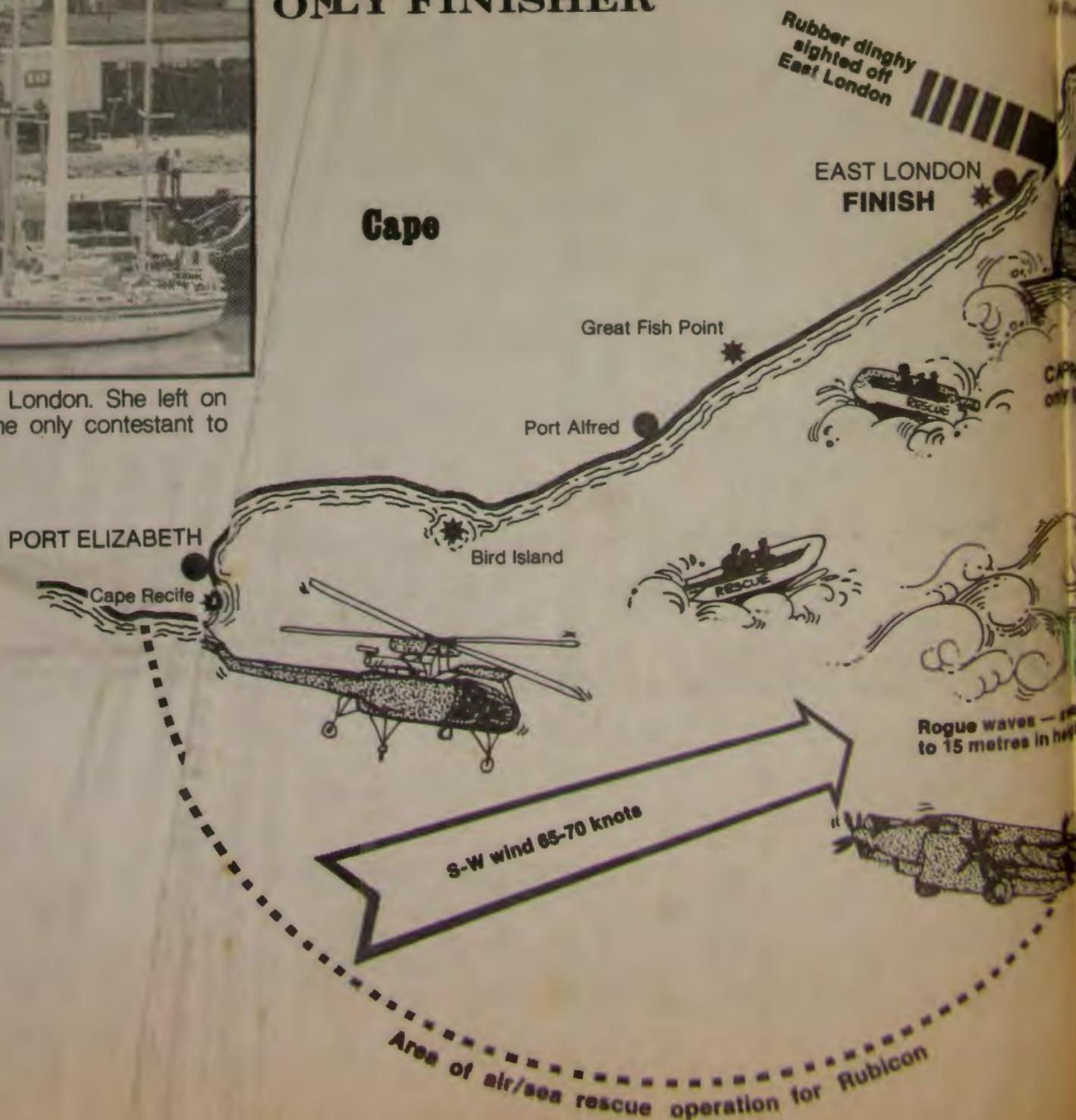
No one could have predicted what appears to have been an unusual movement of the high pressure system off the coast which, instead of moving eastwards out to sea, appears to have moved towards the coast.

This graphic below attempts to explain the resulting disaster which appears, tragically, to have cost the lives of five people, the sinking of three yachts and the wrecking of another.

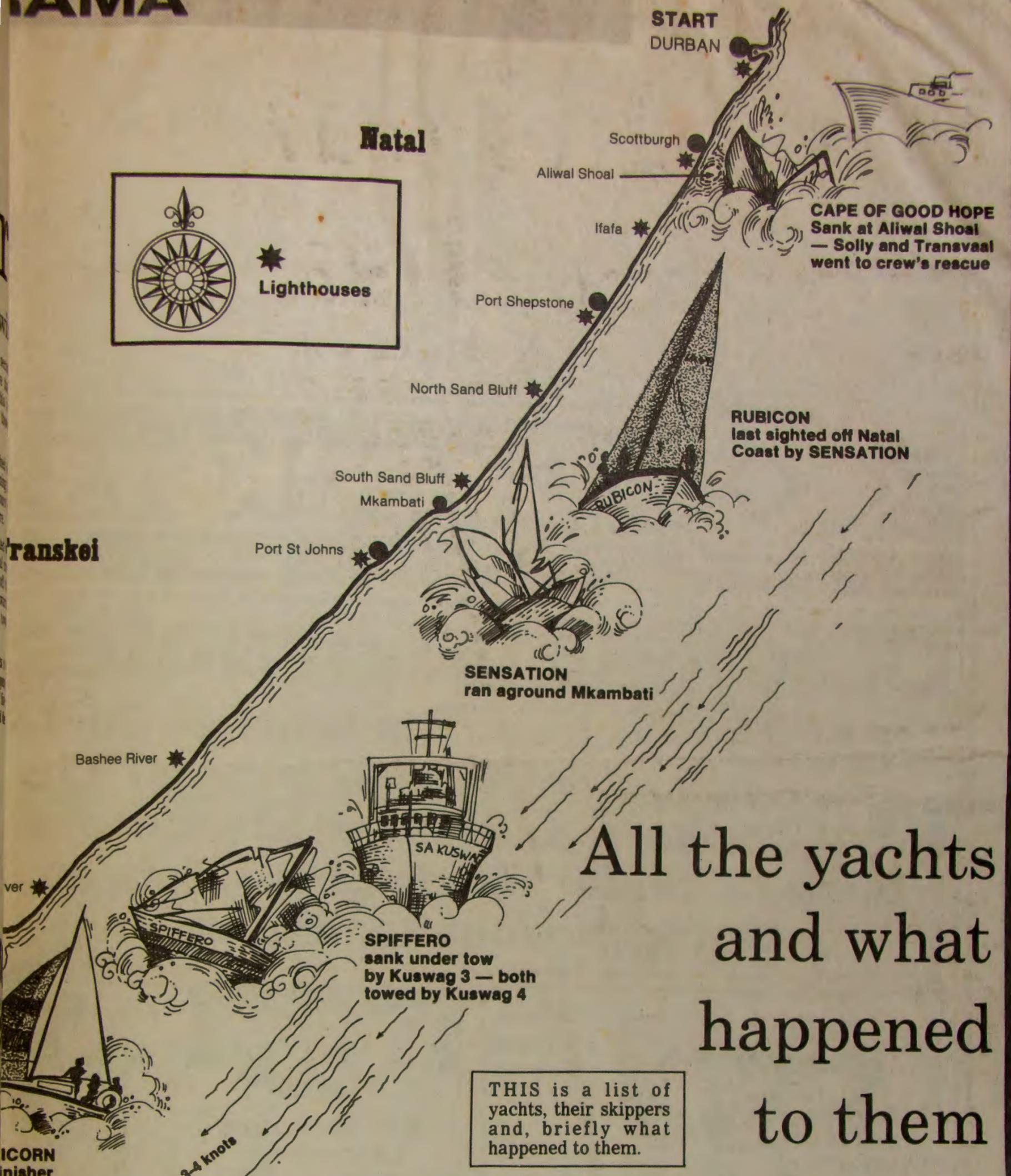
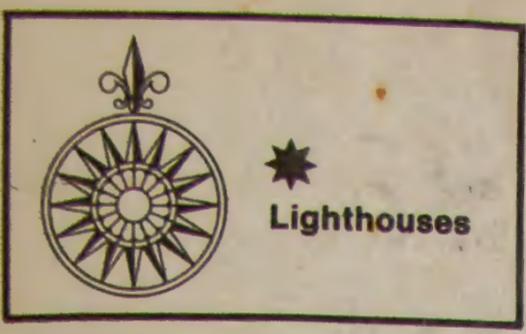


Capricorn docked in East London. She left on Wednesday to become the only contestant to cross the finishing line.

## THE ONLY FINISHER



# DRAMA



**CAPE OF GOOD HOPE**  
Sank at Aliwal Shoal  
— Solly and Transvaal  
went to crew's rescue

**RUBICON**  
last sighted off Natal  
Coast by SENSATION

**SENSATION**  
ran aground Mkambati

**SPIFFERO**  
sank under tow  
by Kuswag 3 — both  
towed by Kuswag 4

## All the yachts and what happened to them

THIS is a list of yachts, their skippers and, briefly what happened to them.

- All yachts belonged to the Category One class which means they have a licence to proceed offshore or to proceed coastwise overnight.
- The first six yachts belonged to the cruising section which, being slower, started on Wednesday the idea being to get the yachts to arrive in East London more or less together.
- 1 Gulliver: Joachem Sturoecher, skipper. No significant damage — towed Excalibur back to port.
  - 2 Capricorn: Goertz Metz, skipper. No damage. Only yacht to cross the finishing line in East London.
  - 3 Spiffero: Peter Spreckley, skipper. Dismasted after two, 360 degree rolls. Sunk.
  - 4 Saxon: Alan Woolnough. No significant damage.
  - 5 Excalibur: Brian Ward, skipper. Rope around propeller broke the propeller shaft. Also knocked flat.
  - 6 Umlelo: Jerry Harrison, skipper. Returned on the first day with steering trouble and seasickness of crew. Missed storm completely.
  - 7 Kiga: Mike Thomas, skipper. No significant damage.
  - 8 Transformer: David Vinnicombe, skipper. Broken rudder and was dismasted.
  - 9 Assegai: Terry Clarence, skipper. Knocked flat but no significant damage.
  - 10 Shaya Moya: Brian Tocknell, skipper. No significant damage.
  - 11 Black Magic: Garth Hitchins, skipper. Stove-in cabin top.
  - 12 Fantasy: 'Noddy' Cooper, skipper. Dismasted, man overboard, rescued.
  - 13 Roller Ball: Geoff Williams, skipper. Underwent 360 degree roll. Man overboard, rescued.
  - 14 Magic Carpet: David Cox, skipper. No significant damage.
  - 15 Element: 'Dick' Haliburton, skipper. No significant damage.
  - 16 Cape of Good Hope: W/O Roland Brown, skipper. Navy entry. Sank but all saved.
  - 17 Resolve: Peter Southam, skipper. Knocked flat many times.
  - 18 Pursuit: Chris Bonnet, skipper. No significant damage.
  - 19 Orca: Brian Mittlefehldt. No significant damage.
  - 20 Crackerjack: Lieutenant Steve Senekal, skipper. Knocked flat on occasions.
  - 21 Standfast: Duncan Grant, skipper. No significant damage.
  - 22 Red Amber: Anthony Hurter, skipper. No significant damage.
  - 23 Sensation: Neil Bailey, skipper. Ran aground and wrecked. A right-off.
  - 24 Charisma: Dave Cuthbert, skipper. Underwent a 360 degree roll. Dismasted.
  - 25 Gunnadoo: Andrew Lawrence, skipper. Broken mast after 180 degree roll.
  - 26 Reaction: Peter Collins, skipper. Pitch-poled (forward sumersault) and broke mast.
  - 27 Helga: Barry Jones, skipper. No significant damage.
  - 28 Rubicon: Siggy Eicholz, skipper. Lost and five-man crew presumed drowned.
  - 29 Thekwini: 'Mac' Vosloo, skipper. Lost mast when spinnaker was blown backward.