

# S Africans in lead as yachts near finish

The Star Bureau

NEW YORK — In what is shaping up to be a sensational finish to the BOC round-the-world single-handed yacht race, two seasoned South African trans-ocean sailors, John Martin aboard Tuna Marine and Bertie Reed sailing Stabilo Boss, are leading a bunched pack of eight racing yachts to the finish at Newport, Rhode Island.

The leading yachts in the surviving 16-boat fleet passing Bermuda in strong, gusting winds are less than 80 km apart and the race organisers say they are expected to stage a grandstand finish on Thursday at Newport, from where the original 25 yachtsmen set out on their 44 000 km journey eight months ago.

A week ago Martin, who won the first leg of the race to Cape Town, was lying eighth, well behind the flying Frenchmen Philippe Jeantot and Titouan Lamazou.

By noon yesterday the 32-year-old South African had surged into a 20 km lead ahead of the American Guy Bernardin sailing Biscuit Lu.

Reed is in third position.

Martin can cross the line first if he can maintain the speed he has generated in the past few days, a triumph for the experienced sailor and his boat.