

# Race is on for second place in the final leg of Whitbread

22/5/1998

BUS. DAY

LA ROCHELLE — The final leg of the final Whitbread round the world race starts from La Rochelle, France, today in what promises to be the shortest but most intense leg of this 31 600 nautical mile odyssey.

This is a 450-mile sprint from the French port up the notorious Bay of Biscay, into the English Channel, through the Solent, to a finish off Southampton's historic waterfront.

Although Paul Cayard and his crew on the Swedish boat EF Language, have already won the race, and have only to complete this leg to collect the trophy, the fight for second and third places is still wide open.

Currently in the runners up position is Gunnar Krantz's Swedish Match, with a 36-point advantage over the Monaco entry Merit Cup skippered by New Zealander Grant Dalton.

However, Dalton has US entry Chessie Racing only 10 points behind him.

Though in fifth place, the crew on Lawrie Smith's British entry Silk Cut, can still take second place, if the dice tumble in their favour, but they are only too aware of Innovation Kvaerner just eight points behind them.

The permutations and combinations of finishing orders, have even the most methodical-minded tacticians in a spin.

American John Kosteki,

skipper of Chessie Racing, summed up the situation: "This is very complicated, too complicated, there are so many different scenarios with so many different boats in it.

"We are going to go out and sail the best race we can, and towards the end of the race we have to look at the points scenarios and then focus on the boats we have to beat and maybe change our tactics during the race."

With the finish expected at about noon on Sunday, the crews have roughly 48 hours of the most physically and mentally demanding sailboat racing they have ever experienced.

Sleep is not an option, the food will probably consist of little more than chocolate bars bolted down whenever a rare opportunity arises, the one essential that will probably be plentiful is drinking water.

Even for those boats without a hope of a decent overall position, leading the fleet across the final finishing line will provide its own particular glory, an honour worth fighting for every inch of the way.

For a number of the old guard of the Whitbread race, who have done as many as five of these epic trips, this will also be their swan-song. They, like Whitbread, will be handing over the race to Volvo and a younger generation. — Reuter.