

# Petersen sails into history books as he finishes race

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TRIUMPHANT South African yachtsman Neal Petersen made history last night when he became the first black sailor to race around the world single-handedly in the tortuous *Around Alone* race, finishing the 27 000-mile voyage in 193 days on his 40-foot sloop, No Barriers.

For Petersen, 31, who was born with a hip-defect yet dived for diamonds off the West Coast ten years ago to finance

and build a yacht, the triumph was the fulfilment of an 18-year dream.

"You can imagine the excitement I feel now after years and years of dreaming of this moment," he said yesterday.

Petersen crossed the finish line off Charleston, South Carolina, about 6.50pm South African time.

He joins Bertie Reed, John Martin and J J Provoyour as the fourth South African to finish. However, he has accomplished this feat on a smaller class 2 yacht than

his compatriots, who all sailed class 1, 60-footers with well-funded campaigns.

Four years ago Petersen attempted the race, but his effort ended in disaster off Port Elizabeth when he lost his mast.

His mother, Stella, a retired teacher from Livingstone High School, flew to the US to greet her son as he crossed the finish line. Petersen was the seventh of nine remaining sailors to finish the race.

He does not know when he will return to South Africa as he has been

invited to speak in Buenos Aires, Ireland and Moscow. He will also run teaching programmes on his boat for children in the US and the Caribbean as part of his No Barriers Education Foundation.

In response to the sceptics who dubbed his boat a "floating coffin", he said: "It's not that I've proved a lot of people wrong, rather that I've proved a lot of people right, those who believed in what I was doing and supported me such as Netcare (his South African sponsors)."