

Shosholoza riding high

SPORTS CORRESPONDENT
Valencia

Team Shosholoza, the South African newcomers to the pinnacle of world yachting, are triumphant after 10 days of racing to tie sixth on the 2006 America's Cup Season Championship, ranking with the Spanish home team, Desafio Espanol.

Team Shosholoza and the Spanish (a team that is challenging for the America's Cup for the fourth time with a budget reputedly three times that of the South Africans) have 12 points each to rank sixth after the combined results of the week-long Louis Vuitton Act 10 match-racing event and the three-day Louis Vuitton Act 11 fleet racing event, which ended today.

Team Shosholoza posted a magnificent sixth place overall in the tightly contested three-day, 12-boat fleet-racing event and an eighth place overall in the week-long match-racing (two boat contest) event, which ended earlier this week.

The South Africans achieved two fifths, a sixth and two eighths to finish sixth overall after five fleet races in the Valencia Louis Vuitton Act 11, with only the four giants of the America's Cup and one Italian team ahead of them. The event was won by Cup Defenders Swiss Team Alinghi, followed by the Italian Luna Rossa Challenge, Emirates Team New Zealand and the US's BMW Oracle. The Italian Mascalzone Latino Capitalia was fifth.

Earlier in the week, the South Africans scooped a total of four victories to score an impressive eighth place overall in the Valencia Louis Vuitton Act 10-match racing event. This event was won by the American BMW Oracle Racing team.

It was Team Shosholoza's best overall match racing result since the campaign was launched in 2004. The team won their first two match races at the Malmo Louis Vuitton Act 6 in Sweden in August 2005 and took three further wins in the Trapani Louis Vuitton Act 8 in Sicily a month later.

"I am so proud of this team. We have done well for our country. When I see them win, believe me, I cry because I am so proud of them," said an



Close shave . . . Team Shosholoza in a close tussle with America's Cup contenders (left to right) Emirates Team New Zealand, China Team, Areva French Challenge and challenger Alinghi (Switzerland), in the Valencia Louis Vuitton Act 11 this weekend

Picture: Peter Goldman

emotional team Managing Director Captain Salvatore Sarno on the dockside.

"Our next goal is to win a South African sponsor. Our logo on our team base in the Port America's Cup is One Team One Nation One Dream.

We are a very proudly South African campaign and we need help to give us the competitive edge. The America's Cup is ranked with the Olympic Games, the Soccer World Cup and Formula 1 motor racing.

"It is a contest that depends

on leading edge technology, human resources and skills. You can't find a better international platform for showcasing all that is positive about our country and our new democracy," said Sarno.

Meanwhile, the word from

Alinghi, Luna Rossa, Mascalzone Latino Capitalia and the other top teams around the Port America's Cup is that the South Africans have upped their game to a new level.

Alinghi helmsman Jochen Schuemann said the South

Africans were doing an "awesome job". In one fleet race, Alinghi had to duck down behind Shosholoza as the South Africans stormed through to finish ahead of them. In another, Shosholoza, in second place up the beat, had

to tack away to avoid dirty air from the Swiss, who were leading. A year ago, this would have been unheard of.

"The skippers of Luna Rossa and Mascalzone only have positive things to say. The word from my friends down the

street is that you are doing very, very well," said Italian helmsman/coach Tommaso Chieffi, one of four professional yachtsmen who assisted Shosholoza in the Valencia regattas as crew/coaches.