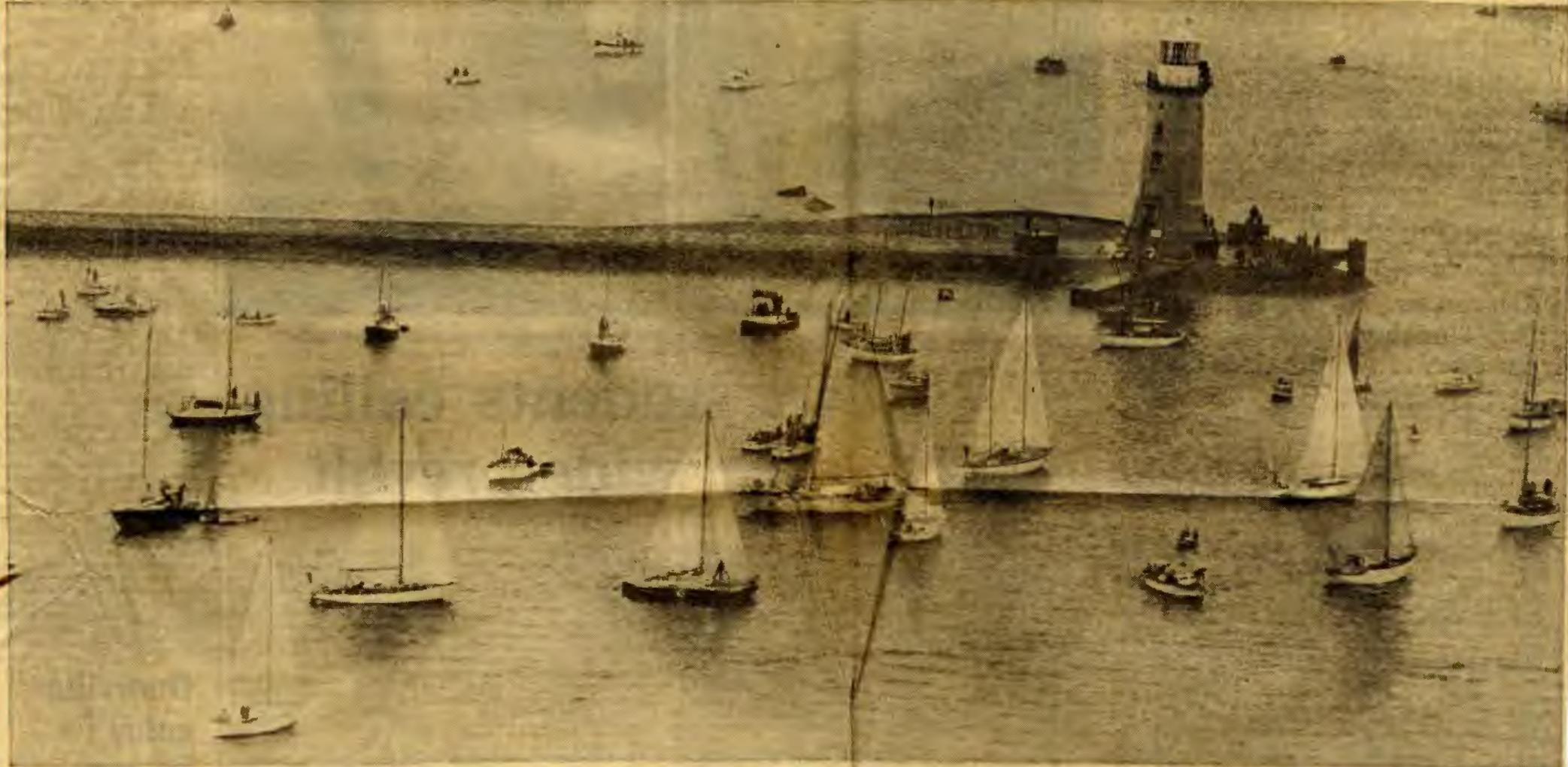


34 men, one woman (and a dog) set out to beat the Atlantic singlehanded



Photograph by CHRIS SMITH

Competitors leave Plymouth at the start of The Observer Singlehanded Transatlantic Race yesterday.

Round-the-world yachtsman off

British paratroop captain John Ridgway, in his yacht English Rose IV, sailed out of Killybegs harbour on Inishmore yesterday on his lone attempt to sail non-stop round the world.

Captain Ridgway is the sixth yachtsman to enter the *Sunday Times*'s single-handed, non-stop, round-the-world race. He withdrew two weeks ago from The Observer Singlehanded Transatlantic Race.

Tabarly sails into the lead —gales ahead

from CHRISTOPHER BRASHER: Plymouth, 1 June

THE OBSERVER SINGLEHANDED TRANSATLANTIC RACE

WITH heavy rain, a calm sea and a vast armada of spectator craft, Plymouth said goodbye to 34 men, one woman and a dog who set sail, at 11 a.m. today, bound for the new lands of North America.

Some of them lie 3,000 miles of turbulent ocean, at least a couple of gales and the loneliness of a singlehanded passage which may last 20 days for some; others may take 60 days or even more. They do it for no material reward, but merely for their own satisfaction in attempting one of the boldest undertakings in this modern world.

This is the third in this series of singlehanded transatlantic races which started eight years ago as a challenge—for half a crown—between Lt.-Col. 'Blondie' Hasler, one of the two surviving 'cockleshell heroes' of World War II, and Francis Chichester. With sponsorship from The Observer and impeccable organisation by the Royal Western Yacht Club, the race has grown from five starters in 1960, to 15 in 1964, to 35 from nine different nations in 1968.

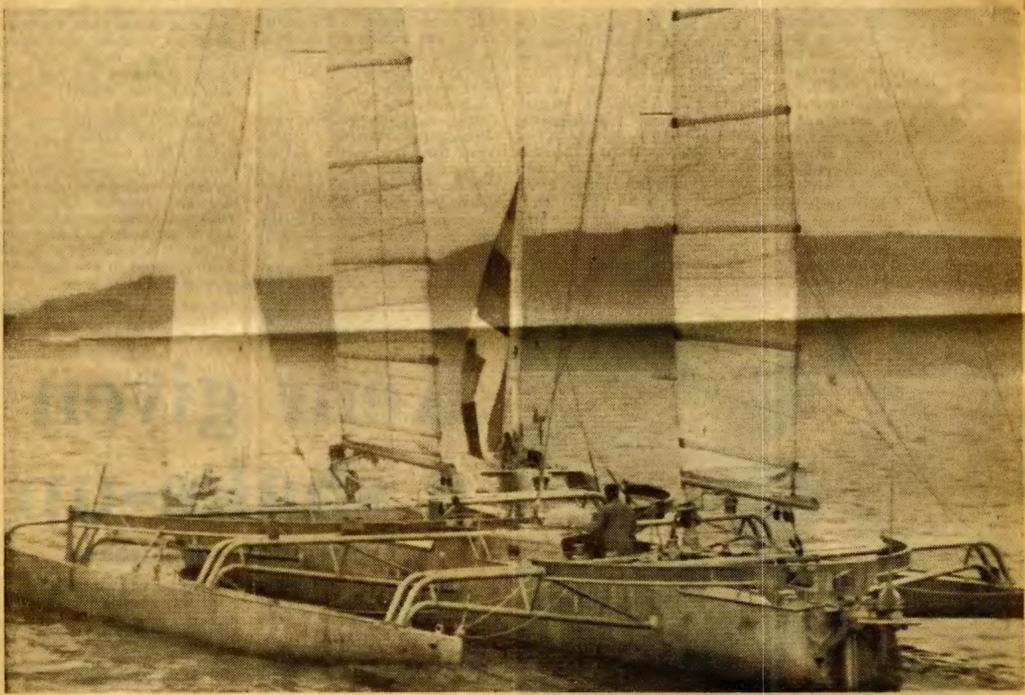
But, despite the size of the fleet, it was the best organised start of all, with the Navy and the Royal Marines sweeping the course clear, shepherding the yachts round Plymouth breakwater and out into the open ocean. And once they got there, with launches and yachts and dinghies milling around every entrance, the pattern started to emerge.

With just one hour gone and at least 499 still to go, Eric Tabarly, the small, bull-necked French Navy lieutenant, sailed into the lead in his startling and stark Pen Duick IV. Some people call it a beautiful boat, but it can only be the beauty of a piece of industrial machinery.

Pen Duick IV is a trimaran (a three-hulled boat) rigged as a schooner. It is huge for one man to handle, 67 ft long, hunched and powerful like its owner, yet making him look like an insignificant dot in his orange oilskins. When it appeared in Plymouth harbour on Thursday it made the hearts of the other competitors sink for it has the very looks of a winner, if, and it is a big 'if,' its rigging stands up to the North Atlantic. It has hollow wing masts which rotate in the wind and the experts look and wonder. Tabarly only has to make one mis-

(Continued on page 20)

499 hours to go: an umbrella send-off as The Observer racers move off to challenge the Atlantic



The monster 65-ft trimaran Pen Duick IV, which has been built specially for The Observer Race, sails off at Plymouth yesterday. At the helm is Eric Tabarly, who describes the boat as a 'sailing machine.' She may look more like a Bailey bridge than a yacht, but her speed cannot be doubted, and she is hot favourite to win.

Tabarly leads—just like 1964

Continued from page 1

take and the mast will be overboard. But Tabarly is the man who won in 1964, beating Sir Francis Chichester, the 1960 winner, by a huge margin despite the fact that his self-steering gear broke early in the race and he had to steer Pen Duick II across two-thirds of the ocean.

Tabarly is also the man who led the race in 1964 from just beyond the breakwater, as he did today, and he increased that lead all the way to the finish at Newport, Rhode Island.

Just behind him were two other Frenchmen, Alain Gliksmann, editor of the magazine *Neptune Nautisme*, in his sleek conventional mono-hulled Raph, and Joan de Kat, in his black-hulled Trimaran, Yaksha. De Kat has a woman's name and compensates for it with a beard that looks as if it has come out of a music-hall make-up box and been stuck on with glue. He is only 27 and confident that he can cross in 20 days. Compare that with Chichester's first crossing in 40 days and Tabarly's winning time in 1964 of 27 days—such is the progress in yacht design.

Behind them, a bright yellow dot in the midst of the milling fleet, came Cheers, sailed by Tom Follett, the 50-year-old American electronics engineer who looks like a smaller version of Ernest Hemingway. He gave up electronics many years ago to become a professional yacht deliverer.

Cheers is my favourite entry. So unconventional so beautiful a boat, so professional an organisation backed by 'the Cheers project team' co-ordinated by the owner, Jim Morris, a young man who lives in the Virgin Islands and calls himself a 'retired banker.' There must be a lot of money in his home town, Denver, Colorado, for a man to be able to retire so early.

Cheers is based on the old Pacific island outriggers, but one can only describe her as unbelievable. Imagine two kayak canoes joined together by two curved spars. Stick a couple of unstayed masts on to one of the canoes and that is it. In one canoe there is room enough to store some food, in the other, slightly enlarged by a blister, is the sleeping, navigating, cooking and 'what-have-you' quarters—no bigger than a couple of coffins.

The Royal Western Yacht Club very properly rejected Cheers as a crank entry, but when it made passage from the West Indies to England earlier this year in 28½ days—a distance of 4,200 miles—there could be no denying that one of the most exciting craft in the world was a fit challenger to the North Atlantic.

It was an entry entirely in keeping with 'Blondie' Hasler's original idea that this was a race to stimulate original thinking amongst the designers.

If Tom Follett is going to live for the next three weeks in two coffins then Commandant Waquet is going to live in three-quarters of a coffin—and that is not the happiest word to use about his craft. It worries many people, including the Royal Western Yacht Club, but the self-confident commandant has an answer to every objection.

The commandant calls his boat Tamouré. I would call it 'Sea Glider,' for M. Waquet has even less room to live for three weeks than a glider pilot has for a day. Anyone over six feet cannot lie down in the little cubby-hole right at the front of the middle of the three hulls. Behind him, open to the sea, is a couple of square yards of planking, called a deck, and some nylon webbing stretching across to the outer hull.

That is all. Stark to the point of madness and in imminent danger of suffering from severe exposure. But

the commandant says he will win in 20-21 days and there is no doubt that he is in a hurry. He rounded the breakwater today, perched on the bow and paddling like mad, hot on the heels of the Rev. S. Pakenham, who was rowing Rob Roy with gusto trying to keep up with the leaders.

Commandant Waquet's pupil, Fraulein Edith Baumann, was taking things easily in her Waquet-designed trimaran Koala III. She towed her mentor out to the start and then while he paddled off into the Atlantic, she hung around until the melee had subsided before setting sail in stately fashion at the tail end of the fleet.

There have been slight ructions between her and the commandant these last two days. She has been showing a certain independence and the commandant has virtually washed his hands of her. 'Her parents are here and if they say she can start then she can start. She can always turn back.'

But will pride let her? She has had to learn so much since the com-

Guide to the race: Page 18

mandant channelled her ambition from becoming the first woman helicopter pilot to becoming the first woman to cross the Atlantic alone. She has completed her 500-mile qualifying cruise and she knows she can last for five days in the North Sea and English Channel. But can she last 30 or 40 days in the North Atlantic?

Why does a beautiful, 26-year-old woman need to do such things? I was always brought up on the theory that handsome men and beautiful women have the world at their feet.

Edith Baumann, whose yacht is too heavy for the light winds, later put back to harbour for the time being. There is another beautiful, and to me, poignant lady here today. She is 25 ft long and rigged with a junk sail reminiscent of Hong Kong waters rather than of Plymouth Sound. She is called Jester and what a wealth of experience she has. This will be her fifth singlehanded crossing of the Atlantic and she will give her new skipper, Michael Richey, just as sweet and comfortable a passage as she did 'Blondie' Hasler in 1960 and 1964.

I sailed her once and I felt that even I could take her across the Atlantic.

As they ghost gently in the light airs towards the Lizard and Land's End one cannot help but wonder at the diversity of men who are venturing on this enterprise.

There are tough professionals like Tom Follett or Eric Tabarly who has spent nearly £50,000 on the race and is backed by 31 different French firms. There are amateurs like 47-year-old Brian Cooke, a Poole bank manager, who has borrowed a boat that was built in a backyard in Stanmore, Middlesex, and who has sunk his savings of £1,000 in 'a once-in-a-lifetime adventure.'

There are some who need only a few hundred pounds like 24-year-old Nigel Burgess in Dogwatch or the bearded senior aircraftman Michael Pulsford, who built his own trimaran, White Ghost. But they have all one thing in common—they take their lives in their own hands knowing that it is only their own skill and self-sufficiency that will bring them safely to the other side.

Let us blink from the fact that there may be trouble this coming month. I am not competent to assess the risks or the benefits of such a race, but the editor of *Yachting World* has done it for us in this week's editorial: 'A huge gust of fresh air has blown



Dear friends I am going to sea... The Rev. Stephen Pakenham paddles his ketch Rob Roy out of the harbour.

Photographs by JANE BOWN, CHRIS SMITH and TONY McGRATH

across the yachting scene. Rating rules, conventions—practically everything—has been thrown away in the interests of lightness, simplicity and speed. Among the entries are 50-ft boats, weighing what some 25-ft boats do today; multi-hulls that, only a few years ago, would have been dismissed as something from outer space. Where is all this going to lead?

'A certain element of eccentricity is bound to be present in an event of this sort, but the thing must be, and appears to be being, kept within bounds. By insisting on a 500-mile qualifying cruise, the organisers automatically eliminate the majority of cranks who might otherwise be attracted. On the other hand, we must face the fact that, with growth as fast as we are seeing, trouble is inevitable.

'Whether it comes this time, or next, is unimportant; someone is going to be drowned. But to say something that can be said without offence before it happens, more easily than after, a death does not necessarily matter. It would matter a great deal if the organisation was at fault, or if the aims of the race were stupid, but this is not so.

'The challenge is exciting, and the race is giving yacht designers a whole new chapter to write. The Singlehanded Transatlantic is a "special case" and so long as the organisation remains in good hands, a death when it comes, and the resultant hullabaloo, must not be allowed to distort the overall picture.

Life is precious. It must not be thrown away in a foolhardy way but perhaps it can be lived fully for some men, and now, for some women, only when life itself is at stake.

Meanwhile, 25 miles out...

IN THE evening, with the sky now blue and a heat haze over the sea, we found the fleet, between the Eddystone Lighthouse and The Lizard, some 20 to 25 miles out from Plymouth.

Tabarly was leading a large group of yachts, coaxing and trimming Pen Duick to keep some way on her in the flat calm.

It is too early yet, with just eight hours of the race gone, to talk of any placings as being significant. But the little yellow-hulled Cheers was there, with Pen Duick just 300 yards away. This is going to be the fascinating battle; two professionals, Eric Tabarly and Tom Follett, both equally strong and experienced in ocean navigation; their boats both revolutionary with Pen Duick so huge (all of 5 tons despite her aluminium hulls) and Cheers so small (at 1½ tons the lightest in the race).

Behind them the big Italian catamaran, San Giorgio, on which they had worked all night and most of the morning, had caught the tail-enders despite starting nearly two hours after the gun.

And back in Plymouth harbour, a very tired and very dishevelled Edith Baumann came ashore for a talk with her parents and a large meal of steak and salad.