

The third man: Robin Knox-Johnston leaving in Suhaili in the round-the-world race

Rifle-and-Bible seaman sails



By Philip Norman

ROBIN Knox-Johnston sailed from Falmouth on Friday, third man to set off in the Sunday Times Golden Globe race around the world. His 32 foot teak ketch Suhaili, he admitted, was still "a bit of a bog" inside.

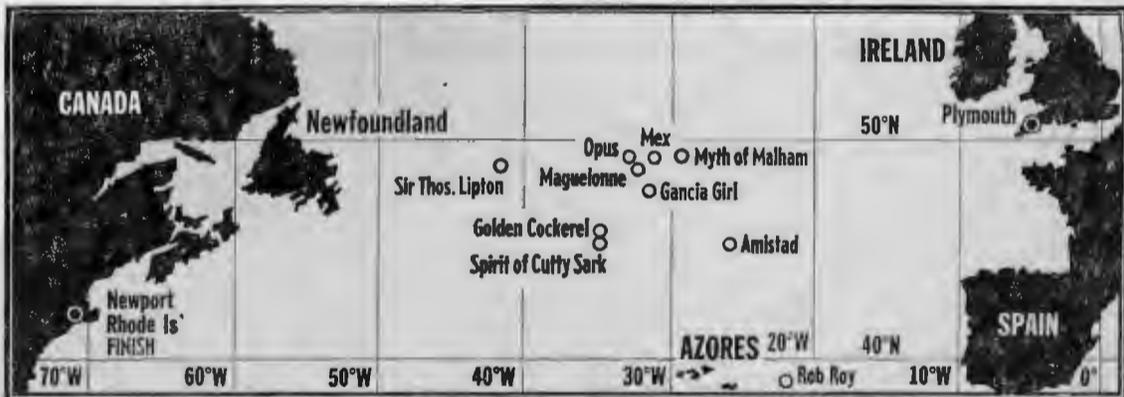
A scruffy, pleasant 29-year-old merchant seaman, he is a fortnight behind Captain John Ridgway and six days behind Sergeant Blyth. Ridgway was spotted yesterday a few miles north of Madeira. He reported all was well. However Knox-Johnston is a lifetime ahead of the two soldiers; he was a Master Mariner at 25, and skippered a Durban coaster.

Suhaili was built in Bombay four years ago. Her interior had to be finished skimpily when Knox-Johnston's two partners pulled out. Having sailed her to England her paintwork now is grubby, her cooking utensils neglected, her portholes a mask of dust. But she is sound, solid teak. "A real old icebreaking boat," a harbour official said. "If she hit England, I'd be concerned for England."

But Suhaili is no gazelle. The twin-vane self-steering device that Knox-Johnston invented gives her a wallowing, trawler appearance. He says he does not consider himself a serious contender in the Golden Globe race if Commander Bill King leaves soon in his brand-new, turtleback Galway Blazer II.

"I'm not doing this to prove anything to myself either; but simply because it hasn't been done before and I'd rather like to do it."

Just before he left Falmouth his churchwarden father handed him 100 rounds for his .303 rifle. He has four boxes of chewing gum, Gilbert and Sullivan on tape and his books include a volume of Rabelais, which remains the property of the Seamen's Educational Mission. The Missions to Seamen padre



The latest positions in the Observer trans Atlantic race

gave him a Bible. "I do believe in God; there is something out there that looks after you," Knox-Johnston said. He is very confident about his own reactions to killer-waves. "I remember, off the Azores, just looking at the seas and thinking 'My God, I'd better do something about this'."

He was seen off by his parents, his brother Michael and his Labrador Gus; also by a phalanx from the Sunday Mirror, to whom he will send radio messages. On the voyage he wants to write a book and study for the examinations of the Institute of Transport. He may also repaint his boat.

Of the four remaining definite starters in the race, three will leave England soon. Loick Fougeron, the only unsponsored competitor, will sail in his cutter Captain Brown as soon as he returns to England from Casablanca. Bernard Moitessier, is also on his way from Toulon to start out in his boat Joshua; and Commander King is putting the finishing touches to Galway Blazer. He expects to complete his voyage in as little as eight months.

"Tahiti" Bill Howell, now disputing the lead in the Observer Trans-Atlantic race, in his catamaran Golden Cockerel will start round the world about a month after returning to Plymouth to refit.

They will be competing for:

THE SUNDAY TIMES GOLDEN GLOBE

Awarded to the first non-stop single-handed circumnavigator of the world. The yacht must start and finish at the same port in a northern latitude (north of 40 degrees N) and must round the three capes (Good Hope, Leeuwin and Horn).

THE SUNDAY TIMES ROUND-THE-WORLD RACE (Prize £5,000)

The prize will be awarded to the single-handed yachtsman who completes the fastest non-stop circumnavigation departing after June 1 and before October 31, 1968, from a British port.

It must be emphasised that the Sunday Times has no desire to encourage undue risks. To have a hope of success, yachtsmen

must have seamanship of the highest order and a yacht and equipment of high quality. Good mental and physical conditions are two obvious further requirements since the psychological problems of eight to 12 months alone at sea are virtually unknown. The Sunday Times is prepared to arrange independent advice for doubtful entrants.

Lone yachtsman Alec Rose, last spotted a week ago off the Azores, is expected back in England this week at the end of his solo voyage round the world.