

19/6/68

Atlantic hunt for lone sailor

LONDON. — Aircraft and ships combed the Atlantic last night for a lone French yachtsman adrift in a rubber lifeboat after his trimaran broke up 600 miles west of the Irish coast.

M. Joan De Kat, 27, was forced to abandon his boat, the 50-ft. Yaksha, and the transatlantic solo yacht race from Plymouth, England to Newport, Rhode Island, yesterday morning after rough seas destroyed his ship's rudder and mast.

A Royal Air Force spokesman said that three RAF Shackletons and two U.S. Army aircraft from Iceland were searching the rescue area in widening sweeps.

FOUR SHIPS

Meanwhile four ships have sped to the search area, but the earliest anyone was expected to reach there was 11 o'clock last night, South African time

The RAF spokesman said that weather conditions were good for a search — but cautioned: "It's like looking for that needle in a haystack — only three times harder."

Visibility in the search area was 10 miles. There was a 20-mile-an-hour wind and swells of 8 ft.—conditions considered good for the Atlantic.

A commercial airlines pilot spotted De Kat leaving his yacht for a yellow dinghy this morning.

Before leaving the sloop-rigged Yaksha, De Kat radioed the following appeal: "Lost mast . . . No rudder . . . One float only . . . This is my last message."

HIDEOUSLY UGLY

His yacht, which he designed himself, had been described as "hideously ugly".

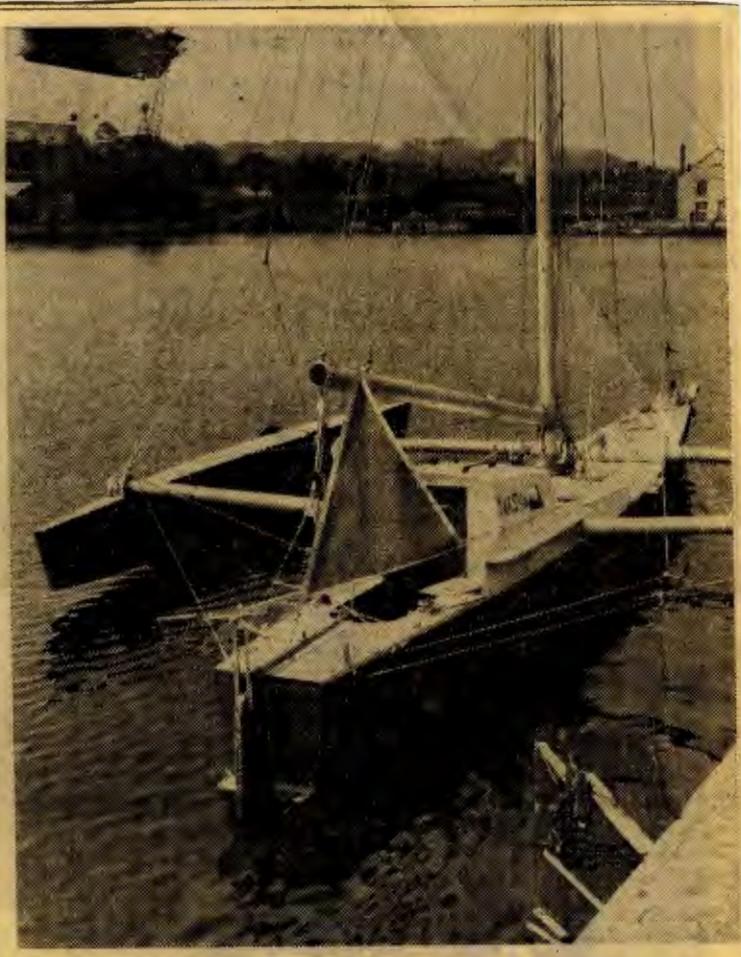
There are 29 yachts left in the 3,500-mile race. Geoffrey Williams, of Britain, is thought to be leading, but judgment is hard to make because the boats are using different routes.

His position at 8 a.m. SA time was: 46° 05' N and 48° W.

Positions reported on Monday were:

Spirit of Cutty Sark: 43° 50' N and 50° W at 7.30 a.m. SA time; and

Rob Roy, 37° 20' N and 35° 20' W.—(Sapa-Rtr.-A.P. and Cape Times Correspondent.)



At Plymouth just before the start of the transatlantic yacht race: French yachtsman Joan de Kat, 27, abandoned this sloop-rigged trimaran at the "point of no return" in mid-Atlantic yesterday.