

Canadian leads — but Martin is sailing well

The Argus Foreign Service

LONDON. — South African yachtsman John Martin is still among the leaders in the Carlsberg single-handed 1988 transatlantic yacht race aboard Allied Bank-Voortrekker II.

Martin's 18m Class 1 sloop was within sight of the early race leader, Britain's Tony Bullimore in the slick trimaran Spirit of Apricot — but both were following a route which has not produced a winner since the inaugural race in 1960.

Bullimore slipped to eighth as Canadian Mike Birch and the French contingent started to take command of the 3 000-mile event.

The race, which started in Plymouth on Sunday, is scheduled to take the leaders about 14 days to reach Newport, Rhode Island.

After a night of frustrating calm, skippers strove to make the most of the fickle wind.

Birch held a slender lead over the bunched fleet of solo sailors 100 miles south-west of the Scilly Isles at the end of their first 24 hours at sea.

The Canadian skipper, sailing the Nigel Irens-designed 30m trimaran

Fujicolor, held a one-mile lead over Loick Peyron, the French soloist aboard another class-one trimaran, Lada Poch.

Peyron had obviously overcome the damage to his boat's starboard foil, caused when it clipped the committee boat at the start.

Eight miles to the north, Bullimore was keeping track of Phil Steggall's American trimaran Sebago.

Steggall may be best-placed should the Force 5 north-easterly winds predicted by forecasters displace the high-pressure system's holding influence over Monday's conditions in the Western approaches.

Noelle Corbett, one of the first casualties to return to Plymouth immediately after the start, put back to sea on Sunday evening after repairing the self-steering equipment on her monohull, Outrageous.

Another late starter was Dutchman Henk van de Weg, who spent Saturday in hospital being treated for kidney stones. He discharged himself on Sunday to chase the fleet 90 minutes after the start.

Bertie Reed, sailing the reliable Invertex Voortrekker, was in the top 35 of the 92-boat fleet.