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An all-women crew who won't be short of experience

FOR the first time an all-women crew will race in the Crystic Beachcomber Crossing from Mauritius to Durban in September.

The Durban-based L34 Equinox will carry six or seven South African women in the punishing 2 800km race — and they are by no means amateurs.

The co-skippers are both from Durban and hold skipper's tickets — Meme Glover, 33; and Catherine 'Caz' Walsh, 29. Senior crew member Rosanne Sharp of Port Elizabeth has a yachtmaster's ticket from the prestigious Royal Yachting Association of Britain. Between the three they have 72 years' sailing experience.

Other crew members Yvette Arnell, 28, Josie Franklin and Betty Murchie, all of Durban, have coastal racing experience. Yvette and Josie have also made Atlantic voyages to St Helena and England respectively.

With this impressive record the adventurers are hopeful of finding a sponsor to underwrite their costs of about

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER

R30 000. Equinox is owned by Louis Landsberg of Harrismith who has great faith in them.

Entering an all-women crew is the realisation of a dream for Caz, a civil engineering draughtswoman, and Meme, who runs her own sailing and diving school in Durban.

"We thought it would be nice just to be different," said Caz, who, with another girl, helped six men sail Money Penny in the storm-hit 1987 Mauritius race.

She believes it is more relaxed and enjoyable with a female crew — as she discovered sailing Equinox from East London to Durban with four women after the Da Gama race in April.

"There are not the pressures one feels in a male-dominated crew, when one's skill and reliability may be doubted."

The girls are no strangers to gales and big seas. Caz rode gales in the 1987 Mauritius race but her worst experience



□ Yvette Arnell, left, and 'Caz' Walsh on board Equinox in Durban Bay

was in the ill-fated and tragic 1984 Da Game race.

"That made the Mauritius crossing look like a Durban Bay run," Caz recalls.

Meme, who has delivered yachts to Indian

Ocean islands, has made 26 roundings of Cape Agulhas and was the first woman in the South African Navy to hold a yacht skipper's ticket.

Rosanne Sharp, who runs a sailing school in Port Elizabeth, has

rounded Agulhas 29 times.

Meanwhile in the Cape, another woman skipper, Marion Cole, 34, is recruiting a six-member crew for the race — but she wants only men.

"I prefer an all-male crew," declares Marion, who will race a 13m "very fast downwind boat". It is provided by a Cape Town owner but she declines to identify the yacht until she has tied up sponsorship.