

Top pair look unbeatable

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SAILING

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DAILY NEWS

NEW Zealand Endeavour and Yamaha, the two class leaders in the Whitbread round-the-world race, were sprinting towards almost certain victory yesterday.

Both boats held lead positions on the sixth and final leg to Southampton, but more importantly almost unbeatable time advantages over the second-placed boats. Only a breakage could upset the scoresheet.

With less than 650 miles to the finish line, the top boats were fighting for the kudos of being the first boat home — at record breaking pace. The first boats are due tomorrow, which will break the existing leg record of 17 days and 28 minutes by four days.

New Zealand Endeavour headed the fleet, but was being overhauled by Whitbread 60s Yamaha and Tokio, both only two miles astern.

Ross Field, skipper of Yamaha, was confident of his position but was still keeping an eye on Intrum Justitia, his boat's sole rival to overall victory.

Though Intrum was some 100 miles behind, Field was determined not to risk anything.

"Intrum is back and a long way north," Field said. "According to our weather she should have more wind and take some

miles out of us.

"But time is running out for her. I will keep a close watch on her progress. Our only objective is to hold our first overall. If we win the leg, it's a bonus, I will not sacrifice our overall position."

Intrum Justitia was fourth on the water of the Whitbread 60s, 12 miles ahead of Reebok (Dolphin & Youth) which was having its best leg of the race. Merit Cup continued to hold second position in the Maxi class but La Poste was challenging hard, two miles behind.

Positions: Whitbread 60s: 1 Yamaha (Ross Field, NZL) 644 miles to go, 2 Tokio (Chris Dickson, NZL) 644, 3 Winston (Butterworth/Conner, USA) 666

Maxis: 1 New Zealand Endeavour (Grant Dalton, NZL) 642, 2 Merit Cup (Pierre Fehlmann, SUI) 745, 3 La Poste (Eric Tabarly, FRA) 747.