

Girl sold her horse to get yacht berth

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WITH very little fanfare, the yachts involved in a somewhat unusual round-the-world race arrived in Durban this week, about eight months into their 56 000km journey.

That was partly due to the fact that the leading boat arrived before the sun had appeared and partly because the race doesn't have the same high profile as other global circumnavigations.

The Clipper '98 race, which left Plymouth in England in October last year, involves seven identical craft owned by British company Clipper Ventures.

The skippers are all professional yachtsmen, but their crews are made up of people from all walks of life who have paid for the privilege of being involved, and big bucks at that!

According to race spokesman Colin de Mowbray, it's costing each of the crew members around £23 000 (R228 000) to make the complete round trip.

That accounts for a handful of the members of each crew, which average 12 in size, with others joining the race for one or more of the six legs, each of which is sub-divided into several sections.

De Mowbray, himself a skipper in the original race two years ago, describes the competitors as "a bag of Liquorice Allsorts".

"They range in age from about 18 to 65 and a third are female," he said.

"One girl sold her horse to take part; some people increase their mortgage,

and in the middle, there's a large group of competitors who are professional people who just want a break. To an extent, the main cost to them is loss of earnings."

The concept of a race in which competitors pay for their berths is not unique, with the BT Challenge, another British venture, having got things going a few years ago. De Mowbray says this race is not in competition with that, but rather "complementary".

Clipper '98 in which the seven yachts are named after famous tea clippers, avoids "the horrendous stuff, like the Southern Ocean" and travels to places that other races don't, including going through the Panama Canal and stopping in Shanghai, China, where De Mowbray says there was "no marina, just an old cargo basin".

Despite the differences from some of the higher profile races, there is no doubt that this one is intensely competitive. In the section prior to the one which brought them to Durban, from Singapore to the Seychelles, just seven-and-a-half hours separated the entire fleet on arrival.

Alex Thomson, skipper of leading yacht Ariel, which has dominated the race thus far and, barring a disaster, will take overall honours, said he had been able to see the second boat, Sirica, be-



HOT SHOT: Alex Thomson, 25-year-old skipper of leading yacht Ariel in the Clipper '98 round-the-world race, takes time out during the stop-over in Durban this week
Picture: CHRISTOPHER LORENZ

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hind him throughout the leg from the Seychelles to Durban. They eventually finished an hour and 57 minutes apart.

Amazingly, Thomson is just 25 and looks to have a bright future at the sport's highest level.

After a short stop-over in Durban, the crews will leave their moorings at Point Yacht Club tomorrow morning and head south-west, with Cape Town their next stop, before heading across the Atlantic to Salvador in Brazil.