

Yo ho ho ... and a bottle of Marmite!

SOUTHERN MAIL

GRAESON HAW

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SURVIVING the treacherous waters and deep freeze temperatures of the south Atlantic's Roaring Forties with little more than Marmite and Black Cat peanut butter is just one of the "vasbyt" experiences some young seafarers from the southern suburbs have had recently.

Ashton Sampson, 20, of Grassy Park is one of the members of the Royal Cape Yacht Club Sailing Academy who earlier this year returned from a high seas adventure of a lifetime which saw him and his crew mates take eighth place in the Cape to Rio yacht race.

But if Ashton and his buddies figured Rio was going to be all smooth waters, sunny beaches and lots and lots of dental floss masquerading as swimwear on well-tanned flesh, they were in for a big surprise.

The academy's principal, Davey James (not to be confused with a certain Mr Davey Jones and his notorious locker) said the young sailing cadets – accompanied by RCYC manager, Anthony Steward, who skippered the 41-foot yacht *Sea Lion* – hit their first snag in the frenzied, spinnaker-buffeting dash to Rio.

"In the race itself, they actually did damage to the engine – they broke a crankshaft and lost battery power, so they had no electricity on the boat for the last eight days of the race, which meant their water maker didn't work so they had to ration their water," said Mr James.

The team's GPS navigation equipment also went on the blink a couple of times, forcing the young crew



■ Ashton Sampson and Faizel Abdurahman, both of Grassy Park, ride ocean and sky.



■ The crew of the *Sea Lion* dive overboard and take a swim in the Atlantic Ocean

members to make use of sextant navigation – something they'd learned about as part of their academy training.

Ashton, a second-year electrical engineering student doing his in-house training with Telkom, remembers the problems caused by the engine packing in. "We had only 850 ml of water per person per day; it's enough water, but it's hard because you've got the hot sun and everything," he said.

It was on the return trip to Cape Town via Buenos Aires, that yet more adversity came knocking: seven-foot swells and 60-knot winds, cooked up by one of the Atlantic Ocean's bruising storm cycles, pummeled the tiny yacht.

"I think overall the trip back home

was harder because we had a couple of hectic days. We had one day when a storm hit us from out of nowhere."

The weather had been perfectly peaceful, "It was like this," Ashton says, taking his thoughts from the warm winter sun on the stone steps of the Telkom building in Barrack Street to that afternoon when the Atlantic turned frantic. "I just turned back and saw this white line across the ocean." The sight made him think of the movie "White Squall" in which a training ship manned by sailing cadets runs into a tempest and sinks.

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But while the storm chewed the *Sea Lion* good and hard during the night it spat the yacht, and its crew, out unharmed by morning.

Slipping down into the far southern latitudes on their way home, the temperature dropped drastically – there would be no more stripping down to their skivvies and jumping into the Atlantic for a swim as they had done earlier in their voyage.

"It was freezing, my fingers were blue; we were actually looking out for icebergs," Ashton said. To make matters worse the crew's gas supply ran out – there would be no

more hot meals!

"In the mornings for breakfast we had canned fruit, we had to split one can between eight people. For lunch it was two to three table spoons of Marmite, cheese spread and peanut butter; that was our range. For supper it was corned beef and the Muslim guys on the boat had a can of tuna."

The academy – which, with the help of financial backing from the yacht club, MTN and the Jewish Maritime League, started about three years ago with a handful of youngsters who had never sailed before in their lives – has become increasingly popular, and now has 80 students in its ranks. Every fortnight the students attend a three-hour training session in Table Bay.