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# Dalling tells of nightmare

## 24-hour storm

Cape Times Staff Writer

**BRUCE DALLING** kept a meticulous log of the 27 days in which he skippered Voortrekker to second place in the solo transatlantic race—and the full drama of his lone battle against the sea has emerged from its pages.

Extracts from the log have been published by the *Observer*, the London Sunday newspaper that promoted the race, and they provide the clearest picture yet of the man himself and of what he was up against in the terrifying turbulence of the North Atlantic.

As he sailed down the English Channel, hardly out of Plymouth, Dalling wrote in the log: "I must be nuts!"

### LEFT WONDERING

Then come a series of entries reminiscent of the writings of Dana in "Two Years Before the Mast".

They leave one wondering how Dalling ever managed to finish intact—let alone cross the line second.

When he and Voortrekker ran into a gale well out into the Atlantic, he wrote: "She seemed quite comfortable under yankee and mizzen only, and made quite good speed.

"I marvel at how she holds together. I can never get used to bad weather, there is so little one can do after a while.

"I feel emotionally shattered by it all.

"At times like this I will be glad to get there in one piece."

### WORSE TO COME

But there was worse to come.

"I write this on Wednesday the 12th. I have neither the time nor the energy to concentrate on writing.

"The gale moderated at about dusk—and it left the boat soaking wet and in shambles.

"The sun came out and, filled with that fantastic feeling of relief and reprieve that comes after a gale at sea, I cooked a meal of sausages, eggs, berries, and had a couple of whiskies.

"Absolutely out, I slumped into a sopping blanket and slept fitfully. The wind back to South and then E and then NE, and I should have smelt a rat.

### NIGHTMARE

"I woke at 0700 with the 'V' doing nine knots and well heeled over . . . A glance at the barometer and my heart nearly stopped.

"The next 24 hours were the nightmare of a lifetime that will be the subject of my nightmares and will no doubt crop up in my thoughts even while awake.

"By 10 a.m. the seas were as big as the ones in the Mozambique Channel that did me in while sailing Carina (the 25 ft. yacht in which he sailed 8,000 miles alone from Hong Kong to South Africa several years ago).

"I stood below, steering with my legs and hanging on to the weather grip-rail, peering at the seas through the doghouse window.

"I judged the position of the boat by watching the streaks of foam on the water.

"At its height the wind speed was at least 50 knots.

### PRAYED HARD

"Three times, petrified, I had to leap out of an open hatch and lash things to the deck which had broken. I prayed very hard during this storm.

"The height of the waves I conservatively estimate at 35 ft."

Dalling, at that point, obviously thought his chances of winning had gone down the drain.

"It seems as if I'm going backwards.

"Only thoughts of those at home are keeping me going, and a burning desire to still keep going to the very best of what is left in me."

In an interesting comparison between Dalling and Geoffrey Williams, who won the race in Sir Thomas Lipton, and Tom Follett who finished third in Cheers, the *Observer* reports: "In contrast to the smooth Williams, Dalling and Follett look like men who have just sailed 3,000 harrowing miles.

### "NO BETTER THAN LAST"

"Dalling, not far from his 30th birthday, is stocky, with blue eyes and a crisply-curling blond beard and hair.

"He smiles and is gentle, and is deeply aware that he has survived three weeks of psychological hell.

"His hands are calloused, his nails cruelly bitten. When he stepped ashore he said: 'Second? Second is no better than last.'

"He is a perfectionist, a worrier, transparently a romantic.

"Curiously, both he and Williams read books about Lawrence of Arabia. Dalling got through the whole 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' during his voyage.

"And to use a Lawrence metaphor, both men drove their boats through the water like drawn swords.

### METICULOUS LOG

"The horrendous implications of facing those 3,000 miles of water, and the true measure of these men who have done it, can be seen in the meticulous log in which Dalling, the introspective philosophy and theology student from Natal University, set out his lonely fears and his self-doubts.

"He is a little ashamed of it, because he feels that no-one reading it on dry land could understand.

"Perhaps it is easier than he thinks. On the first page he has written lines from Louis McNeice's 'The Sea':

*Incorrigible, ruthless,  
It rattled the shingly beach of  
my childhood . . ."*