

DALLING 'The next 10 days were a bit of a nightmare'

Part II of
his own story

By **BRUCE DALLING**
NEWPORT (Rhode Island),
Wednesday.

THE second week of the transatlantic race opened with a south-westerly gale, followed by a westerly gale rising to Force 9. The next 10 days were a bit of a nightmare.

On the Tuesday night the glass rose to 29.72 and the wind eased to 30 knots, so besides the Yankee jib, I set the mizzen sail and tried to catch up on some sleep.

Three hours later the glass started falling slowly again and I began to suspect that a secondary depression was coming through. I contacted the Meteorological Office in London a few hours later as the glass started plummeting. They replied they had no knowledge of anything untoward approaching.

Les Williams, 50 miles astern in the Spirit of Cutty Sark, was also worried by the signs and listened to my conversation with London on his own radio.

In four hours the barometer fell from 29.72 to 29.51.

At dawn

Just at dawn the storm came through and in two hours I could not even carry a storm jib. It was blowing a steady 55 knots, gusting to 65. The met. office reported 72 knots of wind, and these figures were corroborated by Les Williams and Bill Howell (Golden Cockerel).

I tried lying a-hull under bare poles but the seas started smashing Voortrekker very hard and I had to run off downwind. I tried streaming a warp, after lashing everything down as well as I could, but the warp made her difficult to control, so I winched it inboard again and doing six knots with the wind two points on the quarter.



ALONE AGAINST THE ATLANTIC



The sea was predominantly white under the driving acid and the spray was so vicious that I could not look to windward. My most vivid memory is one of colour contrasts.

Hands bleeding

My hands were bleeding from unshipping the self-steering gear and the red on my oilskins against the white surroundings was an extremely sharp and vivid contrast.

By 2 p.m., when the storm was at its worst, the wave height was at least 35ft. with some of the bigger ones probably about 50ft. And they all had broken water on them, rolling over like thunder.

As soon as Voortrekker picked up too much speed down a wave I broached her. She would lie on her beam ends and the broken water would sweep over her. Then she would recover, gather way from windage only and the process would be repeated.

I dared not turn off dead before the seas as she would have surfed down them and anything could have happened at the bottom — and of course it would be losing me too much ground as I was headed in the wrong direction.

Three times I had to move around the foredeck relashing things that had broken adrift — an experience I'm not going to miss if it doesn't happen again.

Wind eased

By 8 o'clock that night it started easing and by 10 o'clock the wind speed was down to just over 30 knots so I set the yankee again and got going in vaguely the right direction.

Physically I felt a bit shattered, but much relieved that the worst of it seemed to be over. Before I turned in I checked everything for damage and pumped the boat out.

The only serious casualty was the generator. I think it either just got a bad fright or it took some water down the exhaust, because it refused to work, in spite of everything I could do to coax it back to life.

When the batteries went flat I was left without some of my instruments and without communication.

Lost 60 miles

The implications of the storm in terms of the race are now apparent. Geoff Williams in the Sir Thomas Lipton, on advice from his computer centre, skirted north of the storm and made 140 miles in the right direction, while I went 60 miles backwards.

(Williams's course was plotted by computer in England and radioed to him at frequent intervals throughout the race.)

Williams thus gained about 200 miles on me in one day and very effectively wiped out the lead I had established. It took me the whole of the next 10 days to work my way up to him again.

Another gale came through three days after the storm and yet another six days later. This proved to be the crux of the race.

The second gale struck on June 20 off Newfoundland, when I was again in the lead. It came



FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN to greet Dalling on his arrival at Newport was Mrs. Anton Rupert.

through right on the nose and I had to decide on whether to go south on the starboard tack or north on port.

Grand Banks

I studied the hydrographic charts carefully and decided to go south to pick up the prevailing south or south-west winds on the southern Grand Banks. Geoff Williams went north to close the coast of Newfoundland, and his decision was the right one.

He found a working breeze up there and all I found was either a flat calm and thick fog or ghosting winds. This lasted for three days and this single bad decision on my part made the difference between winning and coming second.

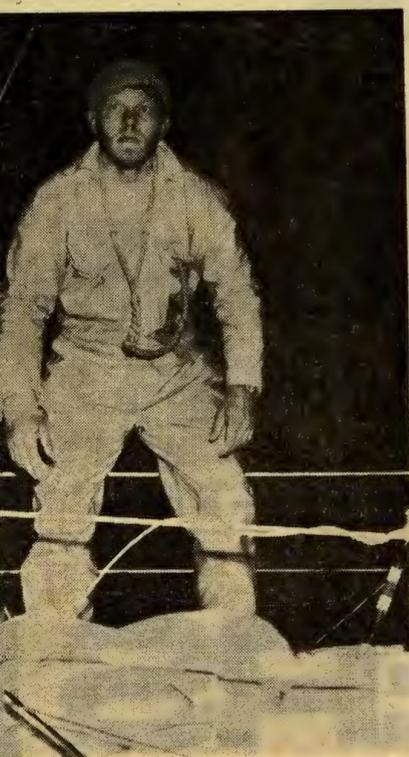
I think the frustration of being becalmed in a race is even worse than fighting to survive in bad weather.

I had no idea where anybody was at this stage — except that I intercepted a radio message from Williams saying that he was moving well.

After the third day of ghosting winds the wind came through again and I set off after him through the fog. — © Argus Company '68.

TOMORROW:

'I have never completely relied on radio navigational aids ...'



AT NEWPORT. The lines of exhaustion are deep-etched in Dalling's face.