

PART III OF
HIS OWN
STORYALONE
AGAINST
THE ATLANTICThe
best
day's
run

By BRUCE DALLING

NEWPORT, (Rhode Island),

Thursday.

WHEN the wind came through off Newfoundland I was faced with three distinct problems. One was navigational, the second was that the wind never seemed to come from the direction anticipated and the third was that I realised that having been becalmed for three days, the chances of still being in the lead were slim.

The weather turned out to be a series of fronts following close upon one another with the result that visibility for the last week never went above three miles and in the last seven days I never got any astro sights at all.

This added to the strain of an already tense situation because in my past experience I have never completely relied on radio navigational aids and have used them only as confirmation of dead reckoning or astro sights.

Navigationally, the first problem was to skirt Sable Island, a notoriously treacherous area. This island lies in an area of unpredictable currents and bad visibility. It has been the graveyard of some 400 ships over the centuries.

This was accomplished, but not without some misgivings, as I had read in the pilot book that it was regarded by mariners as one of the most dangerous navigational areas in the world.

Sounded close

It was particularly frustrating too, that, though I could hear the other competitors transmitting to W.O.O. in Boston, the official radio marine station, none of them gave their positions.

The weather pattern followed the same extremes as previously either blowing hard or not at all as the fronts passed through. Constant windshifts required continuous alertness. From Sable Island to the finish — a period of nearly six days — I got only 11 hours' sleep.

broadcast said that the first yachts were far in that day. This again raised my hopes considerably as only two hours previously I had signalled a trawler to report that I would be in that evening.

At 11 a.m. the same station reported that Geoffrey Williams had arrived. At this stage I still considered that I could win because he had a 12-hour penalty and if his arrival had been reported punctually I had 100 miles to do in 10 hours to get inside his time and win.

Nantucket light

This last 103 miles from just east of the Nantucket light vessel to the finishing line, I covered in 10 hours 14 minutes.

The pressure was maintained until the very last moment because the finishing line is only half-a-mile wide and on either side are dangerous reefs. I homed in on the line in driving rain and force 7 winds and visibility down to 200 yards.

Just when my instincts as a seaman were telling me to head back to open water, I picked up the Brenton Reef tower 200 yards dead ahead and crossed the line a few minutes later.

Some yacht club members who had come out in a launch, told me that in fact I was 17 hours behind the leader, and in spite of a great sense of relief at having arrived safely, it was a very disappointed and dejected South African who tied up at the Port-O-Call Marina.

In calmer waters

THE North Atlantic was less kind to Voortrekker and Dalling than was Table Bay. But this magnificent photograph shows Voortrekker's powerful lines as she slips easily through the water. This was the power that enabled her to reel off 226 miles in a single day.

The self-steering gear problem recurred and when the winds were light I had to take the helm myself. This meant that I could not sleep or devote as much time to navigation as I would have liked.

Do it again

But having been behind and then overtaken Geoffrey Williams in 'Sir Thomas Lipton' twice previously, I believed I could do it again.

The difference between the second transatlantic race and the third became increasingly apparent at this stage and I believe that we had the same conditions that Tabarly had when he established the record in the second race, both 'Lipton' and 'Voortrekker' could have got inside his old record by four or five days.

As it was, it turned out that only two of us broke his previous record and then by a narrow margin.

The southerly or south-westerly winds that I had hoped for never came. The winds were mostly westerlies until the last two days when it came through hard from the north-east.

Record run

This raised my hopes considerably because the seas were big enough for Voortrekker to 'surf' and in the last 24 hours to the finishing line she established what is now accepted as the single-handed record of 226 miles in a 24-hour period.

At 10 a.m. on the last day the Boston commercial news

In retrospect

In retrospect, once the fatigue and strain started to wear off, I saw that coming second was a product of personal bad judgment rather than any other factor.

Having sailed on Sir Thomas Lipton with Geoffrey Williams, I still feel that Voortrekker is a better yacht for this kind of event and is, in fact, a brilliant design.

The designer, Ricus van der Stadt of Holland, can be justifiably proud of having designed two of the first four boats in. The fact that his design did not win the race was due to an error of my judgement rather than his.

In my first article I mentioned that objectivity was difficult due to the fact that even though the race was over, my whole system still continued to live it. I can only hope that the people at home got as much fun and excitement out of the race as I did.

There are many far more competent sailors than myself sailing in South African waters, and with the kind of backing and enthusiasm that has been shown in this project, I am sure that, given a chance, they will earn South Africa greater honours than I was able to.

I hope that this support will be forthcoming.

I want to thank everyone who made this wonderful experience for me possible.

(Concluded)

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