



With ensign proudly flying from the stern, the Knysna-built ketch, Voortrekker, heels to starboard under a freshening breeze. Packed in her tiny cockpit are (left to right) Michael Butcher (Durban), Pat Fraser (Cape Town), John Bull (Cape Town) and Stuart McLaren (Cape Town), part of the crew who are sailing the S.A.O.R.T. yacht in this season's Royal Ocean Racing Club's series of races taking place in British waters.

S.A. makes her Cowes debut

By Chris Cairncross

Isle of Wight, Thursday.

COWES WEEK, which for nigh on two centuries has been considered the premier event in the sailing world, always takes place at the peak of the ocean-racing season in Europe. It is the Ascot of the yachting fraternity, when all the best-known sailors come together for a few days' strenuous racing and even more strenuous socializing. This year it is scheduled to be between July 28 and August 8.

For South Africa, normally a distant spectator of events on the international yachting scene, this year's Cowes Week has special significance. It is her debut into the world of international ocean racing. It is the first time that she is officially participating in the affairs at Cowes, represented on this occasion by the Knysna-built ketch Voortrekker, which took second place in last year's single handed transatlantic race.

Probably as a result of Voortrekker's success, coupled with the large amount of coverage given to offshore events by the world's Press in the past year or so, a tremendous amount of interest has been generated in South Africa in the last year.

First step

As a result, the Cruising Association of South Africa, together with the South African Ocean Racing Trust (owners of Voortrekker) are now pursuing a course of action to raise the standard of the country's ocean racing to an international level.

Their first step towards improving standards has been to send Voortrekker over to Britain with two crews, representative of yachtsmen throughout South Africa, to compete in this season's Royal Ocean Racing Club's series of races, which this year includes the Admiral's Cup series (held every two years).

The two crews are to share the 10 or more races between them. The idea behind it is to enable as large a number of yachtsmen as possible to obtain valuable experience of racing against strong competition provided by the more experienced yachtsmen from other countries.

Voortrekker and her first crew arrived in Britain towards the middle of May and have

already competed in a number of official events.

The crew comprises Capetonians Ivor Jameson (skipper) David Joyce (navigator), Pat Fraser and John Bull, with Michael Butcher from Durban and Jan van der Venster from East London.

The second crew, due to arrive here about July 25, comprises Bobby Bongers (skipper), Dave Abromowitz and Tigler Wybrandt from Cape Town, C. R. Talnton from Benoni, and Don Purell from Durban. The sixth member of this crew, Capetonian Stuart McLaren, came over with the first team and is already sailing with them.

The South Africans have elected Cowes as their home port while they are here. It is a town which is world famous as the headquarters of yachting, a reputation which goes back to Regency times, though its connection with the boat-building industry reaches back much further, to the 12th century.

Cowes is the chief entrance to the Isle of Wight from Southampton, 11 miles away, and stands at the mouth of the Medina River, which divides it in two; with East Cowes regarded as the industrial sector with its shipyards and, more recently, its hovercraft factory; and on the other side, West Cowes which contains the yachting fraternity with their yacht clubs, the oldest being the Royal Yacht Squadron, founded in 1856. It is situated on Victoria Parade and overlooks the Solent, its gun platform prominently in the fore.

I made contact with Ivor and his team-mates in High Street, Cowes' main road, which runs through the centre of the town to the floating bridge on the Medina, the only link between the East and West sections of the port. It was a Sunday

morning and the fellows were on their way back to their "shore berth," a Regency-styled house at the top end of town from which they had a fine view of the yacht anchorage.

They'd just returned to Cowes after competing in the 205-mile Morgan Cup Race. The Race had started at Southsea on the Friday evening and had followed a course across the Channel to Cherbourg on the French coast and back. Voortrekker had taken seventh place in line honours, but had not come anywhere on corrected time.

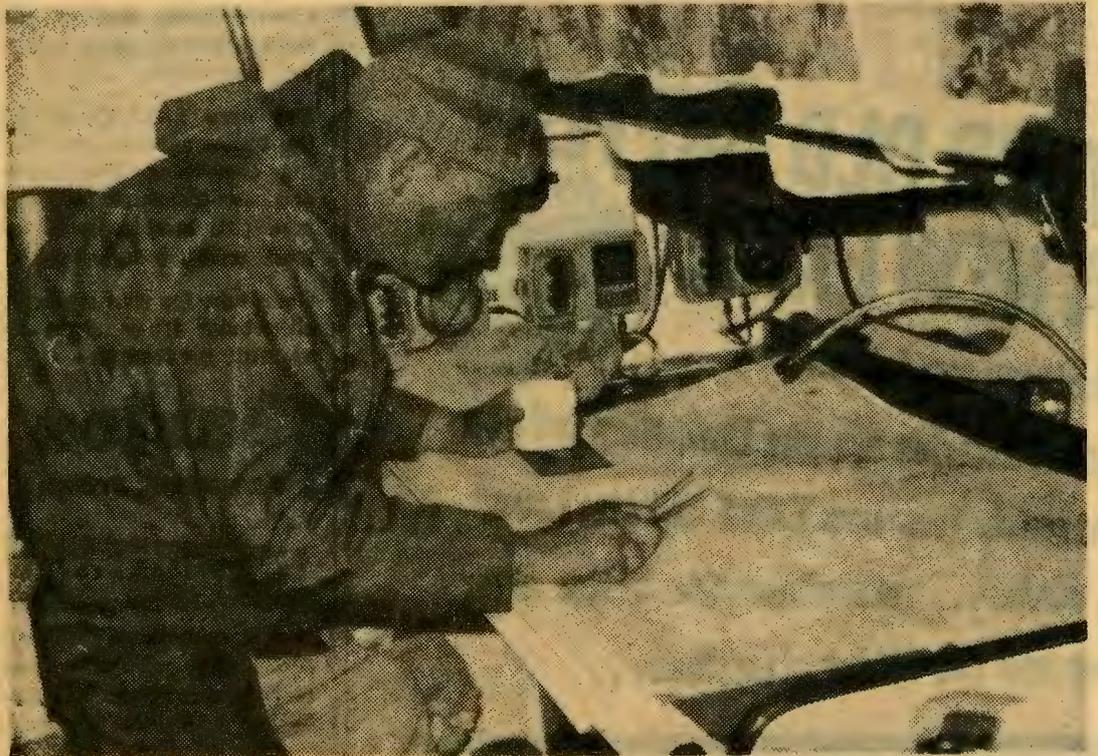
They had already competed in three major races and had put in some really intensive sailing in the month or more they'd been in Britain.

"Well," said Ivor, "we've certainly found the competition extremely strong. And, of course, we're very impressed by the boats here. Quite obviously a lot of money is being ploughed into ocean racing."

Not ideal

Voortrekker, he said, was not the ideal craft for this sort of competitive racing. She had been designed as a single-hander and for the heavy weather found in the mid-Atlantic. Her R.O.R.C. class rating was such that she would have to come streets ahead of the boats in her class to get a place on corrected time.

Basically, Voortrekker's presence here is to give South African yachtsmen a taste of international competition. But also it is to enable them to pick as many brains as possible on all aspects of ocean racing, including gaining some idea of the type and design of boat which is likely to be a potential winner in future races. A very necessary part of South Africa's climb to the realms of international ocean racing will be the acquiring of a number of world-class racing yachts.



Navigator David Joyce checks Voortrekker's position during the Morgan Cup Race which took place from Southsea last month.