



Cliff Barnett, left, and Neil Gregory, who returned this week with proof of their victory in the world quarter-ton championships in Corsica. Owner and crew member Joe van der Westhuizen and skipper Geoff Meek will return next month.

SA yacht wins Corsica regatta

Staff Reporter

FOUR Cape Town sailors in a slightly outdated yacht took the wind out of the sails of their faster, more modern counterparts in Corsica when world quarter-ton championship.

The first all-South African entry in the international regatta was regarded as a non-starter by everyone who saw her.

But Royal Flush, skippered by Cape Town's Geoff Meek, was made of finer stuff than anyone imagined.

"Before we left everyone was laughing and when we got there and saw the competition we laughed too," said crewmen Neil Gregory, 25, and Cliff Barnett, 24, who returned to Cape Town this week.

For Meek it was a dream come true. He has competed in the world championships many times but never won first place. He travelled from Corsica to the Isle of Wight, where he is competing in the Admiral's Cup regatta.

The team's stiffest competition came from the Australian, French and German racing boats, but the Australians broke their mast at a crucial stage in the last race, leaving a gap for the South Africans.

"We didn't even know we'd won the regatta when we finished that last race because we were convinced the Australians were just behind us," said Barnett.

Hoping for flat seas and little wind, the boat was rigged with big sails, but conditions in Corsica were choppy, with 10 to 15-knot winds.



Royal Flush in action at the world quarter-ton championships in Corsica.

"We won only one race, but proved ourselves consistently in all the others," said Gregory.

The yacht was bought by advocate Mr Joe van der Westhuizen in March and the crew began overhauling her in April.

"It was three months of hard slog, working every night to get her ready," said Barnett.

With almost no local sponsorship the crew each paid R4 000 towards the cost of the trip.