

CAPE ARGUS 10-7-93

Sailor maestro in the doldrums

DALE KNEEN

Weekend Argus Reporter

ARGUS

10/7/1993

■ After 60 000 miles sailing solo around the globe, yachtsman John Martin is finding it almost impossible to get a yacht in which to go to sea.

NINE times Springbok yachtsman John Martin has almost given up hope of ever sailing competitively again.

He's been grounded by the world-wide economic recession which has prevented big business from sponsoring him for major yacht races.

The Whitbread Round the World race will start in September without him and there's a "very slim" chance he will compete in next year's BOC Challenge.

"I'm aching to sail again, but I'm all but ready to say this is the end of racing for me," he told Weekend Argus this week.

The tide has turned against the former golden boy of South African yachting in the past couple of years.

The former naval officer and recipient of countless accolades — including the State President's Sports Award — found his marriage was on the rocks.

Then, in the third leg of the 1990/91 BOC Challenge, his yacht Allied Bank, hit a chunk of ice and sank.

That was the last race he took part in. The yacht was to have been replaced, but Allied Bank merged to form Absa, which had a different marketing policy.

In the past two years Martin has approached 22 South African companies and over 15 in America and



Picture: DOUG PITHEY, Weekend Argus

□ **LONG WAIT:** A lack of sponsorship has been tough for yachtsman John Martin, seen here in the Wynberg home he has just sold.

Britain for sponsorship, but with no success.

"I've been bitterly close to getting sponsorship on three occasions but I still don't have a cent.

"Recently I've been negotiating with a world-wide computer software company, but it's already too late for the Whitbread.

"My chances of acquiring an existing yacht — never mind building

a state-of-the-art one — are about one percent."

Many yachtsmen all over the world are in a similar predicament as companies are reluctant to part with their cash.

In the last Whitbread race, about 90 percent of the 30 yachts which competed were sponsored. This year's race has a field of 15.

A new yacht for the Whitbread costs about \$1,3 million (about

R3,9 million) and an existing yacht would cost between \$400 000 and \$800 000 (about R1,29 million and R2,58 million).

Another \$3 million (about R9,9 million) would be needed for the pre-race media campaign and for the race itself.

Sponsors involved in this year's Whitbread race include Merit, Yamaha and a company that makes products to help people stop smoking.

"A sponsorship is very lucrative for companies as it can boost their sales enormously.

"The New Zealand beer Steinlager sponsored the winning yacht in last year's Whitbread and the media exposure enabled it to start a world-wide franchise."

The value of television and radio exposure of the yacht Allied Bank was worth 30 times more than the sponsorship.

Yet, no South African yachtsman has managed to get a sponsorship in excess of R500 000 in the past three years.

South African companies were reluctant to spend large amounts of money on yachting in the present political climate.

Directors also seemed more keen to spend money on sports which they or their children played or were interested in.

"I hold no malice because South African companies couldn't support me, but I've had to start looking for sponsorship abroad.

"However, I think there's a very slim chance that I'll ever race again despite being keen to do at least another two round-the-world races."