

Female yachties take a break before setting sail for Sydney

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AFTER 40 days on the open seas, the 10 all-women crew members of the yacht Elle Racing were tired, sunburnt and caked with seawater, a far cry from the super-model look fellow crew member Elle Macpherson is famous for.

But the Australian supermodel will only join the team next year in September, when they sail in the gruelling Whitbread Round the World yacht race.

Elle Racing is sailing from Southampton to Sydney in preparation for this prestigious world-class event. When she sailed into Cape Town harbour yesterday morning, family and new crew members were waiting on the dock.

But the crew only showed the first signs of excitement when a batch of home-baked chocolate-

covered coconut biscuits was handed to them - before they'd even set foot ashore. The cookies were baked by one of the crew members, Belinda Stowell's mother Margaret, who had come all the way from Harare to see her daughter.

As soon as they set foot on terra firma, the women devoured the rest of the cold drinks, beers and chocolates they'd asked Mrs Stowell to have ready.

"That's all they were talking about the whole trip!" joked skipper Adrienne Calahan.

But the trip was not all jokes and laughter. They were expected in Cape Town for days before they finally arrived. Initially, the team had hoped to be

here within four or five weeks of leaving Southampton on June 9. But the lack of wind robbed them of valuable time.

"Although we had some bad weather, it's been a very good training trip," said Ms Calahan.

One of their worst experiences was a storm in the South Atlantic, when winds of about 50 knots ripped off the yacht's pulpit and washed it away.

"But we just picked up the pieces and kept going," she said.

Ms Calahan described her crew's behaviour throughout the trip as "great" and called them "a lot of good-natured tomboys". She said an all-women sailing crew was still considered unusual in sailing circles.

"In the past, people seemed to think women couldn't handle it. But lately there has been a greater push for it."

The women's training coach Alby Pratt, who sailed with them to Cape Town, commended their efforts and said

they really hadn't needed his help very much.

Mr Pratt, who will leave the women to complete the rest of their voyage by themselves, described the experience of being the only male on the trip as "very interesting", but quickly added it had gone "pretty well".

Most of the team are Australian, although Jenny Armstrong and Jane McKiee are from New Zealand and Molly McCloud is from the United States.

The crew will spend two weeks in Cape Town, then set sail for Sydney.



Pictures: HANNES THART, The Argus.

ALL ABOARD: Alby Pratt, training coach to the Elle Racing yacht crew, stands by the all-women crew: skipper Adrienne Calahan, Belinda Stowell, Emma Westmacott, Jenny Armstrong, Teresa Michelle, Lindsey Marwood, Claire Richards, Gail Parkes, Jane McKiee and Molly McCloud.

QUOTE

They're a lot of good-natured tomboys

Adrienne Calahan
Skipper of all-female crew



BEHIND THE WHEEL: Skipper Adrienne Calahan on board the yacht Elle Racing.



ELBOW GREASE: Right: Jenny Armstrong and Claire Richards show what life is like as part of an all-women crew on board the Elle Racing.