

Cupid stows away on ocean race to Rio

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SO WHO says Cupid doesn't wear a life-jacket and foul-weather gear?

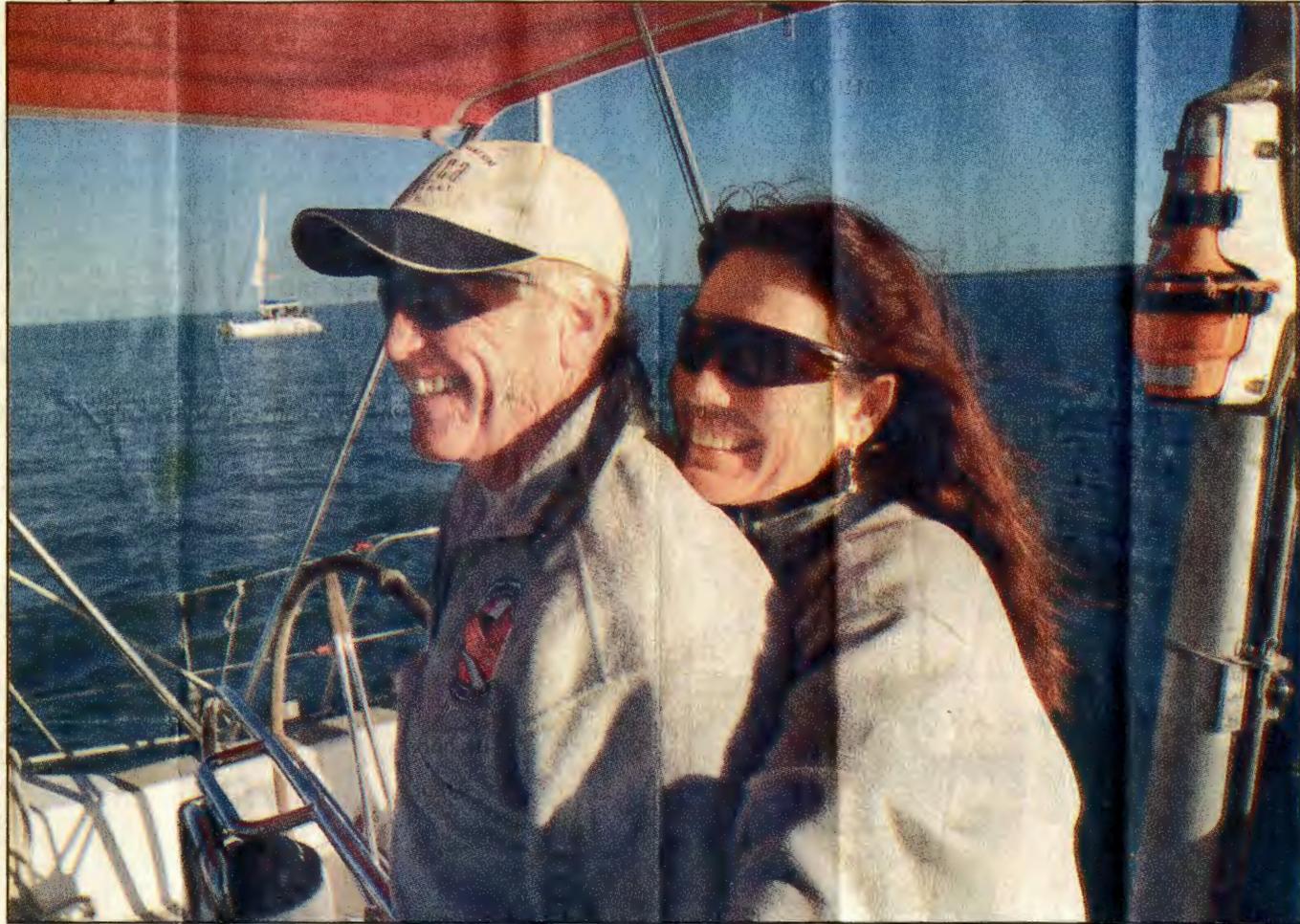
When Cape Town sailor Derek Shuttleworth agreed last year to skipper the yacht 2041, owned by world-famous polar traveller and environmental campaigner Robert Swan, love was probably the furthest thing from his mind.

The 59-year-old retired mechanical engineer and now professional skipper had just six weeks to put the 67-foot, round-the-world yacht back into one piece and to get it ship-shape for the Cape-to-Rio race that started on January 11- it had been one of the major exhibits at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development last October and, among other things, its mast had been dropped.

Shuttleworth (no, he's no relation to Mark) also had to mould a crew for the race that included senior executives of the southern African division of Swan's major sponsor, soft-drink giant Coca-Cola.

Then, there was also 2041's major task to consider once the Rio race was over: Swan's Inspire! project that involved the circumnavigation of Africa, starting in April and lasting at least 18 months, carrying Swan's, and the sponsor's, messages of environmental sustainability and HIV/Aids awareness and prevention to ports around the continent.

But Cupid was hanging around the Royal Cape Yacht Club, and fired a few practice arrows as Shuttleworth assembled his Rio crew which just



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Oceans of love: Cape-to-Rio yacht race skipper Derek Shuttleworth and Nandi Scorer, who fell in love after crossing the finishing line in Rio de Janeiro earlier this year.

happened to include Nandi Scorer, an adventurous 41-year-old senior marketing executive with the soft-drink company.

Although from Johannesburg, Scorer had some yachting experience, and an effervescent personality that had led her to many unusual pursuits, including racing motorbikes.

If nothing else, there must have been mutual admiration in the South Atlantic.

Both now insist that the

Rio voyage itself was all hard work, concentration and serious racing, and that any of Cupid's barbs were still wide of the mark at that point.

"You look like s**t (during the race). It's not the kind of environment where you walk past someone in the galley and say 'Hmmm, he's got a nice bum!' - it just doesn't happen," explained Scorer.

"And anyway, he was my boss for 25 days, and you have very clearly defined roles for that time."

But then in Rio itself, Scorer and the other soft-drink executives stayed in a very smart hotel, while Shuttleworth and his first mate Richard Dennison stayed aboard 2041 - and Cupid played his hand.

"On the second day they phoned to find out what we were up to, and we said 'Come and join us'. And they did, for showers and drinks, and then it just kind of happened!"

After five exquisite days together in Rio, Scorer had to fly home, while

Shuttleworth sailed home on 2041 via St Helena.

"It took him five-and-a-half weeks to sail back, and my phone bill was R12 000," Scorer revealed.

"It was absolutely awesome, but there was this excitement and fear at the same time, waiting for his return," she added.

"I mean, he'd never even seen me in a frock or with make-up on - was this all just the fun and passion of Rio, or did we actually have a connection?"

Scorer was on the dock in

Cape Town to meet Shuttleworth, they took a week off to get to know each other ... and now she's changed both her life, and his!

She's resigned and gone back to managing her own training and marketing business, which gives her the flexibility to join Shuttleworth more frequently during the Inspire! circumnavigation which will last until at least September next year, and possibly longer.

She's managed to fly to various ports of call, including Port Louis in Mauritius, Mombasa in Kenya - from where she sailed with 2041 to Dar es Salaam - and Maputo in Mozambique.

She will also meet the yacht at some of its various South African stops like Richards Bay and Durban, and sail the leg from Port Elizabeth to Cape Town.

Scorer is legal guardian to a 16-year-old boy, and Shuttleworth - called simply "Skip" by his crew - has two adult children from a previous marriage, a son and a daughter.

His 15-year-old grandson Daryn, who was on the boat from Cape Town to the start of the circumnavigation voyage in Mauritius, kept calling him "granddad".

But Shuttleworth had insisted sternly on being addressed in the same way as the rest of the crew did: "It's Derek or Skip!"

Scorer said Shuttleworth was easily able to slip into his role as skipper aboard 2041, where he treated his new love solely as a member of the crew when she was sailing with him.

"If I do something wrong, I get 'k***ed' on. And I really admire that about him - he's an incredible leader of the team. I'm a lucky girl!"