



TIGHT FIT: Shosholoza just about manages to pass under the Woodstock turnoff bridge on the N1, which has a height restriction of 4.6 metres, after the roll bar was removed. Picture: ALAN TAYLOR

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Not all plain sailing as Shosholoza stops peak-hour traffic

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THE Shosholoza yacht will be painstakingly measured forward, sideways and aft this week, but the America's Cup vessel nearly came to grief yesterday because of one critical measurement: the height of the Woodstock turnoff bridge.

With its immense proportions – 24m long with a 36m mast – passing under the bridge was not all plain sailing for Shosholoza, and it brought peak-hour traffic on the N1 freeway to a standstill yesterday for about 20 minutes.

Irate motorists hooted at crew members who frantically worked to enable the yacht to pass through without damage.

Naval architects travelling

behind the yacht climbed into it to remove its roll bar, which was mounted on a bracket along with other instruments.

Not being able to fit under the bridge was an unforeseen problem, as the roll bar had only been fitted when the yacht was in the water at the V&A Waterfront. Shosholoza was moved from the V&A to the Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) depot in Woodstock, where it will be stored until Thursday before being shipped to Europe for the first of the pre-America's Cup regattas.

Before the trip started, the boat had to be disconnected from its keel. Then, while crew members held their breath, the mammoth task of lifting the 24-ton yacht with its solid lead keel

onto the extra-long flatbed trailer was undertaken.

Shosholoza's technical coordinator, Manuel Mendes, anticipated the entire moving process from the V&A to Woodstock would take no less than 10 hours. All transportation costs – about R400 000 – were paid by MSC.

Mendes joked that taking the yacht apart and assembling it again would be a good exercise for crew to help them remember how all the parts fitted together.

During its time in storage, Shosholoza will be stripped of its colourful decorations and its exact measurements will be taken with lasers – an extremely accurate method of measuring – which takes up to four hours.

A requirement for the race in

Europe is that the yacht be without graphics, but after that it will be dressed again with bold African designs, Mendes said.

Team Shosholoza, comprising skipper Geoff Meek, Marc Lagesse, Mark Sadler and Ian Ainslie, will compete in the first pre-America's Cup regatta in Marseille from September 5 to 11 and then for the next two pre-America's Cup regattas in October in Valencia, Spain.

Shosholoza will only return to South Africa towards the end of November when it will again be altered to comply with new race rules set for 2005.

Another yacht will be built in 2005 and Shosholoza, which was built in 2000, will be used for training. The new yacht is to be launched in January 2007.