

Home is the lone sailor Ant Steward

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Weekend Argus Reporter

SAILORS, like cowboys, aren't supposed to cry. But Ant Steward couldn't hold back the tears as he threw himself into the arms of the girl and the family who prayed for him.

With his bare feet back on South African ground at last (he lost his shoes when he was shipwrecked in the Seychelles three weeks ago), he stood in the Jan Smuts airport arrivals hall yesterday and hugged and kissed his fiancée, Sue Middleton.

His mother Muriel, who says she "hates the sea", was next for an emotional bear hug, followed by his father, Ron.

In the public glare of television lights and camera flashes, the family's emotional ordeal was clearly etched in their faces.

Talking to reporters later, Ant was often overcome by emotion.

Dressed in jeans with a piece of sail cord for a belt, the sunburned round-the-world sailor had to turn his head away, as he fought to describe his near-miraculous survival.

Remembering the roller-coaster plunge through boiling surf across a murderous coral reef; the circling sharks attracted by blood from his cut hands; abandoning the tough little five-metre NC Challenger which carried him 40 000 km round the globe; the joy of seeing a fishing smack answering his distress flare.

It was all too much.

He was asked whether the whole experience had changed his outlook on life.

He gulped, and there was a long pause.

"You can't go through something like that and not come out a changed person" he said.

Two things haven't changed — he will be re-building his boat and resuming his voyage for the last leg to Cape Town. He will go back to Surf Island and sail again, hopefully before November.

And, he will marry Sue on August 29. His question "Do you really still want to marry me?" was answered by her with a broad smile, a hug and a kiss.



□ TOGETHER AGAIN: Lone sailor Ant Steward with his fiancée Sue Middleton.