



Wind of change: Lipton Cup entrant Isuzu Challenger, representing Algoa Bay Yacht Club in Port Elizabeth, in Table Bay yesterday.

SA's oldest regatta sails into trouble

THE FUTURE of the Lipton Cup, South Africa's longest-running annual keelboat regatta, is at stake when the main sponsor withdraws its support after this year's event.

The week-long regatta, a premier event on the yacht-racing calendar, is taking place in Table Bay this week.

Many of the country's top yachtsmen are among the 21 teams that have entered this year's event.

Competitors include several sailing development teams helping to train and equip young newcomers to the sport to improve their skills.

But a perceived lack of media

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interest has resulted in the budget for this year's event being slashed.

"Lipton is already withdrawing and the budget they had allowed for this year's event is just enough to cover the essential needs, such as venues and cranes with which to lift the boats out of the water after racing," said event spokeswoman Ronelda Visser.

The Lipton Cup is the oldest regatta in the country.

The trophy was first presented

to the Table Bay Yacht Club by legendary tea magnate and sailor Sir Thomas Lipton in 1902, and the first regatta was held in 1911.

Visser said today she did not believe the regatta would be discontinued.

"The trophy remains the property of the yacht club which has won it and clubs around the country will continue to want to get it into their trophy cupboards, of that I am sure," she said.

"But it does mean that the event could be scaled down if another sponsor isn't found.

"The problem is that Lipton's representatives, Unilever,

believe sailing is no longer part of their profile, and it's not considered a big sport in South Africa at this sort of level.

"We even have problems raising media interest in the big international events that come to Cape Town, such as the Volvo Ocean Challenge, and that's sad, because those events bring a lot of money to the city."

A spokesman for Unilever confirmed that the company was withdrawing its support for the event.

"Marketing director Scott Pitman confirmed it in a message in the brochure for this year's race," the spokesman said.