

GRAND BAIE (Mauritius) — Last-minute intervention by top Mauritian officials has ensured that the four stranded South African racing yachts will be able to race in the Crystic Beachcomber Crossing from the island to Durban on Saturday.

The yachts, Credit Guarantee Solar Wind, Lapwing, Spar Sunseeker and Paper Pack SA, were shipped to the island last week from Durban.

They were however unable to dock in Port Louis because the harbour was full.

In what has been seen as a huge gesture of goodwill to the mainly South African yachtsmen on the island, red tape was waived and

Goodwill act saves SA yachts

the cargo carrier concerned, the Arkcis Sky, was allowed to dock briefly at the molasses terminal on Tuesday night and the four boats offloaded.

No other cargo was allowed to be discharged.

Customs officials then worked overtime to clear the boats.

The Mauritian coastguard also carried out their inspections after hours.

A boatyard at the harbour agreed to stay open late to step the masts.

The four yachts were then motored up to

Grand Baie, some 20 nautical miles up the west coast of the island, arriving early yesterday.

"We should have everything fine-tuned by Friday — and not a moment too soon," said the skipper of Credit Guarantee Solar Wind — one of the favourites in the L34 class — David Cox.

"The co-operation here has been fantastic. I don't know who actually pulled strings, though we are told by the race sponsors that it was at the highest level.

"In fact, I don't know of any other country where we would have

received such tremendous co-operation."

Cox said although they had been dogged by bad luck since the original ship scheduled to sail from Durban with their boats had been delayed, there had also been some good fortune.

"For example, it was a rough passage to Mauritius and the yachts were shifting in their cradles on deck.

"Fortunately the first mate, a Dane who is also a yachtsman, noticed this in time and personally made sure the boats were then extra-tightly lashed down.

"If he hadn't been on board, the boats could have been seriously damaged," he said. — Sapa