



# Tommy recalls his terror voyage

SOME regard it as a fine feat of seamanship, others as madness. But Durban yachtsman Tommy Martin holds the dubious honour of skippering the smallest boat in the history of the Crystic Beachcomber Crossing.

In the 1987 biennial race Martin skippered Sun Tonic, a 29-foot Royal Cape One Design. And it was nightmare voyage he will never forget.

Not only did he and his three-man crew encounter the worst storms in decades — resulting in the devastating September 1987 floods in Natal — but their tiny boat was often knocked flat, they lost their radio, navigation and cooking facilities, and they were continuously soaking wet, cold and cramped.

At one stage when Martin went too far south off Madagascar and they were hit by mountainous seas, the narrow-beamed Sun Tonic was roller-coasting down breaking waves at 20 knots with only a storm try-sail up.

“Our biggest problem was to slow the boat down, which sounds stupid in a race, but I was terrified we were going to break the mast. As it was, we were repeatedly knocked flat, and there was always green water streaming into the cockpit.”

“It was the worst trip of my life. What was also alarming was that we had no radio communications — that had been shorted out with our navigation equipment — so nobody knew where we were. My family were obviously very worried, knowing we were in such a small boat.”

Twelve days later Martin and his crew of Brian Rawlinson, Mark du Toit and Dave Tarr sailed triumphantly into Durban. Du Toit it was who had taken sextant fixes on the pitching deck in the huge seas.

“My crew were terrific,” said Martin. “They knew I had made a bad mistake going too far south, but there was never a hint of recrimination. In fact even though we were cold, wet, hungry and cramped in that tiny cabin, we were still able to laugh at our predicament.”

Martin’s advice to skippers this year: “Get a big boat.” It is advice he has followed. He skippers the bear 41-foot sloop Jay.



# A spartan journey

SHOPPING for supplies to last the 1590 nautical mile (2800km) trip involves a great deal of careful planning on the part of the crew members.

As the leading yachts will spend at least a week at sea — some of the smaller entries will spend between 10 and 14 days on the ocean — a tremendous amount of thought goes into just what gets stowed in the galley of a racing yacht.

Limited space and the weight of the yacht dictate that the minimum of items be carried on board during the race. This is especially applicable to the numerous L34s taking part in the race this year. They generally carry more of the dehydrated type foods, as every gram counts — excess cargo could become a big handicap. Race rules dictate that

every yacht carry a minimum of 2,5 litres of fresh water a day for every member of the crew. While this sounds quite generous, it isn’t really as this daily ration of water is used for everything, from shaving and brushing teeth, through to cooking and drinking.

A number of different theories exist when it comes to the type of food taken on board and the way in which it should be preserved. Most of the yachts, especially the smaller ones, don’t have any refrigeration facilities at all and this limits the crews’ choice of food.

Many visualise the trip from Mauritius over the finishing line, just off Durban, as being one long party. This, however, is not the case at all — most of the participating yachts do not even carry alcohol in an effort

to keep the weight of the vessel as low as possible.

Fresh food is a luxury on board as the hot climate and absence of any refrigeration make it almost impossible to carry any at all. Eggs, for example, are smeared with vaseline, cheese is wrapped in vinegar-soaked muslin cloth and food cans are often varnished to prevent them from rusting.

Essential items such as can openers, matches, cutlery and sunscreen lotion cannot be forgotten and the more experienced yachtsman usually takes his own spare set of these items along with him, just in case something is washed overboard in heavy seas.

Before the start of the race, the yachts are packed very scientifically and with great care. Weight must be evenly

distributed and packed down low, as close to the centre line as possible.

The labels are removed from the cans of food and the contents are written directly onto the tin itself — this means that in the event of the yacht becoming wet, the crew will still be able to identify what is in them.

Another luxury on board the yachts is bread — some crews do bake their own while others simply do without. It is a known fact that most crew members lose a few kilos as a result of the combination of nervous energy, hard physical work and a rather frugal diet.

Crew members take the minimum clothing with them — a few changes of clothing are ample. Washing is done in sea water to save the fresh water, and bathing is done in a bucket, using

dishwashing liquid as soap, as it is the only detergent that foams in sea water.

“Pot luck” is the order of the day when it comes to meals. Cooking is usually done very economically using only one pot. Crew members take turns with all the chores and as the boat is moving 24 hours a day, there is always something to do.

Every boat is required to adhere strictly to the race regulations and all carry their own First Aid supplies. From headache pills and plasters, to splints and pain killers for more serious injuries, they carry them all.

The Meiring Naude will have a qualified doctor on board for emergencies and she will be in constant radio contact with all of the yachts. — Sapa

# Three overseas entries

THREE international entries are among the 38 taking part in the Crystic Beachcomber race between Mauritius and Durban starting tomorrow.

The international yachts are a Jeaneau 36 (Mistral Gagnant) from Reunion, a Jeaneau 47 (Windeb) from Liverpo-

land and a Spilhaus 55 (Spilhaus) from the Channel Islands that is being skippered by last year’s overall winner Ted Pittel.

Twenty of the remaining yachts are registered in Durban, one in East London and 13 in Cape Town.

Both previous races were won by Cape Town-based yachts. In 1985 line honours went to Royal Palm (Assagay) while Three Spears was placed first on handicap. In 1987 Royal Palm (now Isle Bell) was first across the line and Spilhaus took the handicap prize.