

Ready to hit the breeze from Grand Baie

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IT all depends on wind conditions and indications late this week were that the 37 yachts in the Crystic Beachcomber crossing from Mauritius to Durban which starts later today off Grand Baie will have good winds behind them on the beam initially.

The yachts sail north-east at first, round a buoy and then go south, hugging the island's western coastline. They continue past Port Louis right to the south-western tip before heading south-west for Madagascar and going as close as possible to its southern end. Then they continue the arduous 1 600-mile voyage to Durban.

The wind in Mauritius has been blowing consistently from the east or south-east for weeks and indications are that following winds will make the race truly a downwind one — at least until the coast of Africa is reached. But weather patterns are, of course, unpredictable and all the shippers are anxiously obtaining the latest information and discussing theories.

The 37 starters range from Guardian National skippered by Tony Abbott of Durban, to 65-foot Hulett Aluminium, owned and skippered by Lee McGregor of Durban.

Only Windeb from England will not arrive in time for the race — reducing the entries from 38 to 37.

Daily News Correspondent

The past two days have been busy for skippers and crews of all the boats as they replenish provisions, make minor repairs and wade through the documentation that goes with the race.

Although the winner of the Crossing is based on handicap using the international measurement system, everyone recognises the prestige and glamour that go with line honours. And here the attention — and the pressure — are on the four 60-foot-plus maxis and a couple of 50 to 55-footers.

The Boss looks mean and menacing, battleship grey in her unpainted aluminium above the waterline. She has the man acknowledged as the best skipper in South Africa in Geoff Meek and an experienced crew to complement his skills — and the power and size of the boat.

Although she is owned by Colin Kuiper of Durban, she is regarded as a Cape Town boat because of her crew. She lines up in opposition, yet almost as an ally, of the other Cape Town maxi, Tuna Marine Voortrekker II.

This famous boat has been modified drastically since 1987 and she has another new boom and main-

sail after damage on the voyage to Mauritius. Skipper Lieutenant-Commander Hano Teuteberg is tall, a good sailor — and commanding.

These two yachts probably have the best chance of breaking the 8 days 15 hours 7 minutes record to Durban if the race is not downwind all the way.

The two Durban maxis who could outpace them if conditions are strongly downwind are Get More Fun and Hulett Aluminium.

Skipper McGregor has the determination to win and the sleek dark-blue clipper-bowed cutter is the best-looking yacht in the fleet.

Canoeist, Springbok swimmer and a former Springbok lifesaver, who at 37 is still among the top three Iron Man competitors in South African lifesaving, he brings to his yachting the same grit and physical strength that characterises all his water sport endeavours.

His boat was designed as a 'surfing machine'. He wants to win badly and says he knows he can if the winds blow strongly from astern. If the race involves a lot of beating, Hulett Aluminium has no chance.

If I were a bookie and were to lay odds they would be something like this:

Overall handicap winner: 3-1 Cape Concrete Corum; 4-1 Swimlion; 5-1 Thunderchild, Ilse Bell, Be-

luga, The Lanzerac Hotel, 7-1 Spilhaus, Close Again, Suburban Hardware, Afi Warrior, Vuarnet Roulette, Credit Guarantee Solar Wind, 10-1 the others.

There is no great range in odds because on the IMS the medium and smaller boats all have a fair chance. Only the Maxis are complete outsiders.

Odds for L34 line honours — there are 12 of these proven all-rounders sailing — are: 3-1 Suburban Hardware, Afi Warrior, Vinarnet Roulette, Credit Guarantee Solar Wind, Close Again, 6-1 the others.

For line honours the odds are hedged according to wind conditions.

Downwind: 3-1 Hulett Aluminium, 4-1 The Boss, Get More Fun, Voortrekker II, 10-1 Ilse Bell, Beluga, Corum, 15-1 the others.

Light or headwinds: 3-1 The Boss, 4-1 Voortrekker II, Get More Fun, 5-1 Ilse Bell, 6-1 Hulett Aluminium, 10-1 the others.

The odds have been estimated after talking to various pundits, skippers, officials and media men.

LATEST: THE Boss, one of the favourites for line honours, may not sail across the starting line today.

Skipper Geoff Meek of Cape Town said he would know if the boat's damaged keel had been sufficiently reinforced only late last night. But he was "reasonably confident."