

Race officials set for marathon yacht watch

By TOSH LEVETT-HARDING

CAPE POINT race officials will battle to keep their eyes open for 48 hours while monitoring one of the most gruelling yacht races in the country this weekend.

Keeping a watchful eye on the 80-strong First Bowring Double Cape fleet from an isolated spot in Cape Point Nature Reserve will be Eric Wells, chairman of the race committee.

Wells, recently appointed secretary of the Cruising Association of South Africa in Green Point, will get little more than an occasional doze in the 48 hours allotted for the 133-mile race which will start at 6pm on Friday and finish around midday on Sunday.

But Wells is an old hand at the procedure, having done it six times before. Ironically, though, he has only sailed in one of the previous 11 Double Cape races and each year vows to be out with the starters the next time around.

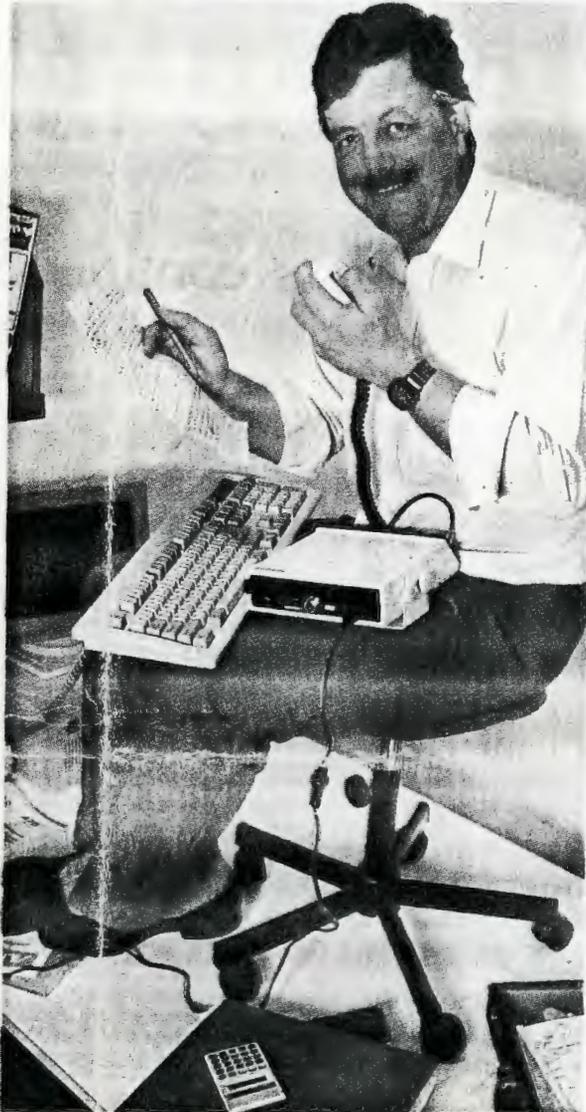
The yachts will start from their respective home ports, Table Bay, Hout Bay, False Bay and Gordon's Bay and follow an anti-clockwise course around the Peninsula that will take them past Cape Point twice to finish at their own port. Part of Wells's job will be to ensure that each yacht makes radio contact with the bridge vessel when rounding the turning marks in Table Bay, Hout Bay, False Bay and Gordon's Bay.

Lonely post

This year Wells will have an assistant — Richard Austin, a retired director of First Bowring which initiated sponsorship of the popular race.

Austin will be flying to Cape Town for the event and will join Wells at his lonely post.

Also part of the monitoring team will be Philip and Gill Barratt — well known in yachting administration circles.



LONELY VIGIL: The chairman of the race committee, Eric Wells, will be monitoring the gruelling yacht race from a lofty perch in the Cape Point nature reserve this weekend. The success of the 133-mile race, which will start at 6pm on Friday and ends around midday on Sunday, can be seen in the increasing number of entries.

"Fortunately Phil is a marvelous cook and always manages to cook up something delightful for us. Lunch on Saturday will be the highlight when guests of our sponsor come to Cape Point to join us," Wells said.

But it is largely because of Wells's commitment and stamina that the race has been comparatively trouble-free since it was introduced 12 years ago.

Anxious wives

Position updates of each of the boats are fed to race control at regular intervals throughout the race from the bridge boats in Table Bay, Hout Bay, Simon's Bay and Gordon's Bay right until the last yachts get home on Sunday.

"I never shut down until I know that everyone is safely at base or

has abandoned the race, for whatever reason, somewhere along the course.

"It's nice to be able to reassure anxious wives and girlfriends who phone to check on the yachts' progress."

A regular check on weather conditions from the lighthouse radio room also enables race control to alert contestants to unexpected changes.

"In extremely bad weather we issue warnings to smaller boats which can save them a lot of damage and discomfort," said Wells.

The success of the popular race can be seen in its growing popularity among Peninsula yacht clubs and the increasing number of entries.

"This is what yachting is all about — camaraderie and friendship," Wells said.