

Large fleet challenges for honours in Agulhas race

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IT was 1974, and yachting history was about to be made in the Agulhas race on the famous South African Navy entry, Voortrekker I, skippered by a 30-year-old Petty Officer named Bertie Reed and sailing with a crew of six including a young watch captain, Lieutenant John Martin. In mist and spray, Voortrekker I was surfing down huge waves in 55-knot gales at speeds of up to 20 knots to the turn mark at Mossel Bay, about to gybe and beat back into one of the world's cruellest seas.

Astern of Reed, to his delight, was his mentor, the doyen of South African yachting, Bobby Bongers, on the 17-metre ocean racer, Jakaranda, which had won the race the previous year.

"Biltong Bertie" was only to learn later on the return leg that Voortrekker I was the only yacht left in the race as the other 11 entries, including Jakaranda, ran for cover at either Mossel Bay or Struisbaai to ride out the storm.

When he sailed the boat into Simon's Town harbour to win both line-honours and on handicap with three men at the helm, he became a national sailing hero overnight, was dubbed "Captain Couregeous" and also weathered the storm of criticism that he had foolishly risked the lives of his crew and damage to the boat.

That race was sailed exactly seven years before Reed's spectacular performance in the first BOC race, in which he finished second on the 16-year-old Voortrekker to receive the accolades of the yachting world.

After a three-year absence, the Spilhaus Agulhas race, first sailed in 1955, is once again with us this weekend, but Reed and Martin have not entered.

Sadly, Voortrekker I, the yacht which put South Africa on the world sailing map with Bruce Dalling's Transatlantic triumph in 1968 and set the ball rolling for the inaugural 1971 Cape-to-Rio race, is today lying rotting in Simon's Town, badly neglected by the SA Navy despite high-level lobbying for her either to be maintained and raced or put in a museum.

In total, 24 entries have rallied to the challenge of the great race,

this year shortened from 440 miles to 220 miles and with the turning mark at Struisbaai.

The grandma of the fleet is the SA Navy's Centurion 33, Southern Maid, which first sailed in the 1973 race. This time around she will be skippered by an SA Air Force yachtsman, Jonathan Balladon.

Southern Maid, at 33 foot, shares the distinction with Three Spears (Mike Clarke) as being the smallest boat in the field, but the UCT entry boasts the youngest sailors in the fleet and the rising stars of South African yachting.

The SA Navy's big entry is none other than the legendary 60-foot Voortrekker II, which John Martin sailed in the 1987 BOC race. Word from the dockyard has it that the famous yacht, like her predecessor, is in an atrocious condi-

tion. She will be skippered by Craig Barlow.

The skipper with the most experience of the race is 1976 winner Dave Abromowitz, on the Lavranos 50-foot Beluga, but another former Royal Cape Yacht Club Commodore, Ted Kuttel, on the Swede 55 Spilhaus, also has vast experience dating back to before the 1971 Cape-to-Rio race. As a race sponsor, he would be delighted to lift the trophy next week.

Current Commodore John Levin will be sailing one of the smallest yachts in the race, the Stadt 34 Indaba.

At first glance and on the strength of his Whitbread round-the-world experience and, more recently, a second place on handicap and third over the line to Rio, Padda Kuttel's maxi, Namsea Challenger, must be the favourite to clinch both line-honours

and handicap laurels.

The dark horses are the four Simonis 35s, highly competitive entries in the shape of Scatterling (Alan Geeling), Ballyhoo (offshore racing series points leader Craig Sutherland), Lady Lorna (Gary Farrow) and Furuno (Jando Oceanisk).

In 1991, only four boats responded to the challenge, but all the enthusiasm and excitement are back this year. Who knows, maybe another legend and more heroics could be in the offing.

WHILE most Capetonians were being sand-blasted into their homes on Sunday, boardsailors were revelling in 30-knot winds and near-perfect conditions at Blouberg during the second New Wave provincial wave-performance competition of the year.

Sixty sailors took to the seas with a strong contingent of internationals, with Dutchman Robert van Sooligen back and trying to repeat his performance of last year when he won every event he entered to comfortably finance his South African surfari.

There were equipment casualties on the way, though. Brad Shrimpton was forced to retire with a smashed mast, while Craig Metrowich sailed brilliantly to reach the semifinals only to have to bow out due to a broken universal joint.

Ultimately, however, Van Sooligen proved he has not lost his penchant for winning, although he was pushed all the way by local Jacques Killian in a final characterised by ferocious forward-and-backward loops and consistent scores of eights and nines.

The three judges were

unanimous in pronouncing the Dutchman the winner, with Russ Levin placed third and Metrowich fourth.

This Sunday is the Fun Slalom event, which forms part of the Milnerston festival. Sailors must register at 2 pm at Table Bay opposite Surf Energy. Racing will commence at 3 pm.

FOUR out of five ain't bad for Western Province surfing, but closer

inspection reveals the lack of depth in the sport in the Cape at present.

Congratulations to Capetonians Warren Kushner, Quinton Jones, Dean Geraghty and Adrian Fields on their selection in the men's open division for the South African squad for the world championships in Brazil in May.

However, in the u-18, bodyboarding, longboard and women's divisions, not one WP surfer qualified for selection.

The South African squad

Open Division: Warren Kushner, Quinton Jones, Dean Geraghty, Adrian Fields (all WP), Jason Maisch (Natal).
u-18: Greg Emelie (Bdr), Gert du Preez (Zur), Sean Holmes (SC), Justine Maisch (SN), Byron Howarth (Natal).
Women: Candice Brendt (Natal), Georgina King (Natal).
Bodyboard: Douglas Cockwell (Natal), Alistair Taylor (Natal).
Longboard: Bruce Jackson (Natal).
Managers: Neville Wilkins (Border), Graham Hynes (Natal), Bill Sharp (Natal).

EXPERIENCED triathletes and beginners alike have been invited to compete in a half-standard triathlon at the Elsenberg Agricultural Showgrounds in Stellenbosch on Saturday. Interested competitors can phone Sue at tel 64-2396 or Greg at tel 685-2683 (home) or 419-3800 (work).

THE Western Province team finished second place behind Northern Free State at the South African national underwater orienteering championships at the Appletiser Dam on the Appletwhaite Farm, Grabouw, last week.

The competition, at which the new international rules were applied, was very keen.

The results

M course: 1 M Wright (WP) 1 262 points, 2 M van Veeien (NT) 152, 3 J Bernardi (NOFS) 500.
Star course: 1 G Becker (NOFS) 600, 2 J Doick (NT) 500, 3 J de Jager (NT) 500.
Individual: 1 G Becker (NOFS) 1 654, 2 T Joubert (NT) 1 313, 3 M Wright (WP) 1 302.
Dick Graa: 1 G Becker (NOFS) 3 235, 2 T Lewinson (WP) 2 404, 3 J Bernardi (NOFS) 2 055.
Pairs: 1 M Wright and S Woodbourne (WP) 684, 2 J Tapson (WP) and D Botha (NOFS) 640, 3 I Summers and A van der Merwe (WP) 584.
Team: 1 WP 848, 2 Northern OFS 636, 3 Northern Transvaal 400.
Overall: 1 Northern OFS 5 501, 2 WP 4 604, 3 Northern Transvaal 4 335.



WE'RE BACK! ... The L-50 Thunderchild, co-skippered by Rhett and Glen Goldswain, has entered every Spilhaus Agulhas race in recent memory, and is expected to be at or near the front of the 24-yacht fleet fighting for honours again when the event takes place this weekend.