

# Cape to Rio race looks north

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JOHN Martin, one of South Africa's most celebrated yachtsmen, hopes that next year's Cape to Rio race will attract sailors from the north.

The race, which starts in Table Bay on January 15, is set to be a humdinger, said Martin, who is commodore of the Royal Cape Yacht Club.

"This is not just a Royal Cape event. It is a great classic ocean race that belongs to all South African sailors," said Martin.

The race has been brought forward a year to avoid a clash with the round-the-world Volvo Race. It will set out for Rio 40 years to the day from the start of the first Cape to Rio race in 1971, which drew a fleet of 59 yachts and top sailors from around the world.

The last two races were sailed to Salvador in Brazil's state of Bahia, north of Rio de Janeiro, to which the race now returns.

"Everybody wants the race back in Rio," said Martin. "It links the two most beautiful cities in the world, so in my mind it is one of the world's best ocean races."

He said the Yacht Club of Rio de Janeiro were pulling out all the stops. "Our finish is just before the Rio carnival, so this will be a great race."

Inland yachtsmen are hardly strangers to the race. Wolf Seitz from Johannesburg won in 2003 and was navigator on the winning boat in 2006 in the race to Salvador.

"We have a good tracking system for the racing fleet, which will enhance it for armchair sailors. It's a system we've had developed along with recent technology advances, so communications should be good," he said.

"The South African Navy is sending SAS Drakensberg as the communication platform, with both print and radio media aboard."

Martin acknowledged that world economic conditions might restrict entrants.

"But I have been surprised by the number of inquiries," he said.

"People forget this is one of the world's great yacht races and a good breeding ground for our youth development programmes to ensure world-class sailors of the future."



AHOY MATEY: Yachts like this sleek US entry Rambler, which has a crew of 24, are expected to be part of the fleet when it sets off from Table Bay in January in the Cape to Rio yacht race

Picture: TREVOR WILKINS