



# Tabarly—to-day's cool favourite

THE French remember the words of Montesquieu, *Ce sont toujours les aventuriers qui font de grandes choses* (it is always the adventurers, who accomplish great things) and 39-year-old Eric Tabarly, France's foremost ocean-sailing yachtsman and favourite for to-day's Cape to Rio race is a national hero, established as such by the award of the Legion of Honour.

Bachelor Tabarly is an aero-naval pilot, temporarily attached to the Ministry of Sports by the French Navy. But sailing the sea has been his one obsession, since he was introduced to it in boyhood in his native Brittany by his father Guy, also a lifelong enthusiast.

Tabarly père gave his son the first of the five sailing vessels — now five of them — called Pen Duick (means a little French bird, with the short wings and long legs of the jenny wren). It was a gaff-rigged cutter built on the Clyde in 1888. But the rest have all been designed by Eric Tabarly himself and differ in type. Pen Duick III, which he sails to-day is a 15.5 m (51 ft.) schooner.

TABARLY'S achievements in the various Pen Duicks have established him as the world's leading small-boat sailor (our own Bruce Dalting, of course, is one of his chief rivals).

The Frenchman's first claim to this top rating was in 1964, when he won the single handed trans-Atlantic event from a field which included Sir Francis Chichester. Among many other subsequent triumphs, he was first in the Sydney-Hobart classic, in the boat he sails to-day, and, in 1969, he won the San Francisco-Tokyo event in the single hull 16.5 metre (35 foot) sloop, Pen Duick V.

But he has had his setbacks. A series of mishaps, including mid-ocean collision, caused him to return to base

in his 65-foot ketch-rigged trimaran, Pen Duick IV, when he was a strong fancy to win the Plymouth - Newport (Rhode Island) race of two years ago. And, when favourite again, he was only fourth in Pen Duick III in last year's Los Angeles-Tahiti event. Here an experimental skeg failed to have the favourable effects that were hoped for.

TABARLY is, in fact, forever researching and experiment and there is at least one unorthodox feature which he has introduced to his vessel for this race. He says, à la Chevalier: "A search there must always be for making ze boat go forward faster."

He has been here since Christmas Eve and every day has seen him working hard on his craft, ensuring that everything is a hundred per cent for the coming weeks' great test. "A boat she must be as fit as ze crew," he observes.

FIT indeed he is, hard-muscled, ruggedly built and his skin toughened by the elements. If a little short, he is a striking-looking figure (a writer once called him a miniature Gary Cooper, adding that he left the same impression of a coiled spring, concealed). But he is every inch the man of the sea, his eyes its own green colour, tousled dark hair, sometimes a stubble beard growth and mostly in a dark high-necked jersey, seasoned with the smell of the sea.

Nobody could say that Tabarly's English is fluent but it is intelligible with the foreigner's flair for improvising an expression to transmit a thought more vividly than it would be by an accepted phrase.

He is a man of few words, even in his own language, seemingly content with his singleness of interest and his

own thoughts. He does not read many books on subjects other than the sea and its ships. At home he rarely, if ever, visits a theatre or cinema. They say that he does not even own a radio set.

A loner? Yes, but he declares that he does not shun society. It's that he is more detached than reclusive.

Tabarly does, however, avoid parties as much as possible, as he does publicity, but, with Gallic politeness, he receives reporters who manage to hunt him down, with patience and courtesy.

His life, even when not at sea, is Spartan. Simple and spare meals, with a little *vin rouge* or *vin blanc* (what Frenchman could lunch or dine entirely without wine?) and he is a non-smoker. Tabarly has lived aboard Pen Duick III for most of the 3½ weeks he has been here and it was noticeable that his bunk has no mattress, as we know it, just a thin, hard covering.

Here he will spend his three-hour rest spells during the long journey to Guanabara Bay with his selected crew. He estimates that it will take something in the neighbourhood of twenty days, provided, he emphasizes, the weather is helpful.

Pen Duick III is built to stand up to anything that storm-whipped seas could produce along the trackless ways and, naturally, he has planned a route which is more likely to provide strong-blowing trade winds. The one fear is a Sargasso calm.

Pen Duick III's crew have been hand-picked to cope with the trials ahead. Toughness is their common quality.

Tabarly once observed "One doesn't find champions among the idle rich (*les rentiers*).

DICK STENT