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Crews don't like balmy weather

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Correspondent

REPORTS of beautiful weather out there will not cheer up skippers hoping for 10-knot winds to push them on their way. Position changes have followed the normal light weather pattern of big boats slowing down and smaller craft keeping up some progress.

The lead taken by Ocean Spirit, skippered by Robin Knox-Johnston and Leslie Williams, may seem to contradict this as the Royal Navy Sailing Association ketch is only half a metre shorter than Graybeard, skippered by Lol Killam, but she is far enough ahead to be meeting an entirely different weather pattern. Like Graybeard, she sailed a long ocean voyage to reach Cape Town for the race and used the trip from Malta to work up to full racing trim.

Her present progress will influence skippers faced with the need for an inspired guess or a calculated risk about when to turn west. The north-west course from Cape Town has followed a favourable half-knot ocean current which, in roughly the present position of the fleet, starts to widen out and swing west in a great arc.

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SKIPPERS are faced with the choice of turning soon on to the short course on which the current peters out early, or risking the greater distance of a more northerly course against the reliability of the prediction of better winds well above the Tropic of Capricorn.

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TAFELBERG will see fewer yachts each day as the fleet spreads westward and the leaders widen the gap between themselves and the rest of the fleet. By the time either or both of the disabled yachts are back at sea there could be 1 600 km between the front and back of the fleet.

Under these circumstances the extremes of the fleet can meet extremes of weather so that Jakaranda and Stormkaap could leave the Cape on a favourable wind and sail well into range of a sporting chance.