



Wayfarer's captain, 70-year-old Peter Strong.

## Reflections of a landlubber pitched onto the high seas in a racing yacht

BY DON STAYT

(the 'Wayfarer' of Durban's 'Daily News,' after whom the Rio yacht was named)

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# Wayfarer: stormy tale with a happy ending

**DO NOT WEAR PYJAMAS.** I am not in the habit of wearing anything at all when I go to bed. But just lately I have been dossing down in a pair of swim-trunks, topped by shorts, shirt, track-suit, boiler-suit, jersey, towel, a ski-anorak, cloth cape, oilskins and a second oilskin jacket over all that — all at once. And, in a small yacht south of Cape Agulhas in raging seas and force 11 winds, the get-up didn't seem at all inappropriate.

The newspaper description that I was 'the most inexperienced yachtsman' aboard Wayfarer, my Rio Race namesake, on her 16-day passage from Durban to Cape Town, was an exaggeration. Because on my mother's side my grandfather and great-grandfather were newspapermen and my father's forebears, one and all, were farmers.

And this may explain my natural instinct for being messed about in small boats.

But when you've watched a 70-year-old man—working 10 hours a day, seven days a week for seven and a half months — turn a dream into a beautiful ship you become emotionally involved and in spite of a coronary a few years back cannot let slide an opportunity to accompany the ship as an observer on her maiden voyage.

So there I was for the first time in my life in a yacht at sea with nothing on the clock, a 65-knot wind and hanging on for grim death.

' weren't you frightened?' people want to know.

No I wasn't. You don't panic when you've watched a ship grow from a few lines on a drawing board, witnessed the shaping of every plank and

seen every fastening made good. Nor are you afraid when you've watched a man, who has gambled his professional reputation and lifetime savings, heave to in a gale and steadfastly refuse to turn until he can do so without jeopardising his ship or the lives of his crew. Anyway, what's the use, you're there and that's all there is to it.

'Were you sick?'

I wasn't, but there is no particular merit in that when you think that many hardened yachtsmen are sick every time they put to sea or when you remember crewman Vic Ballot, rolling in an agony of discomfort on the deck, answer his skipper's call and, vomiting over his shoulders, get to his feet to make a sail-change.

Those youngsters on Wayfarer from Durban to Cape Town were terrific. Vic Ballot, Johnnie Beadon and Laurie Williams welded together quickly into a team, going about their duties almost automatically and anticipating the needs of others at every turn.

I saw them haul Johnnie Beadon in a bosun's chair to the masthead in a fresh wind to untangle a Genoa. I saw them on the foredeck when the

wind lifted them from their feet as they struggled to bring in a jib and I never heard them whimper.

I saw them, with the enthusiasm of youth, pleading with their skipper for more sail and he, reading the sea and sky like a book, opting for caution. And between them all the time there was the one-legged navigator, Mellville Duff-Richardson, quietly doing his sums, keeping things shipshape and Bristol fashion and taking his trick at the wheel in all weathers. They were magnificent.

I remembered occasions like this in the war...

Were we worried? Yes we were when we heard the newscasts and we knew that fears were being expressed for the fate of Wayfarer. We worried about those ashore worrying about us because we knew we were safe, safer by far than the crew of the trawler which put out to find us and turned back because of the mountainous seas.

We even felt just a little superior to the giant tankers which passed us going dead

slow, bow-waves breaking right over their foredecks as they punched their way through the seas.

We felt frustration when they ignored our signals or came back at us so fast I couldn't read them. It's 30 years since I last used Morse.

We laughed a lot at little things, like Laurie when he said his feet were so wet he would have to use anti-fouling on them, or the suggestion that the double glass of 'Duff's' cabin lights, now filled with water, would be ideal for keeping tropical fish.

I remember, too, that it seemed rather funny that when I stepped ashore at East London I fell flat on my face. I was a lot steadier on Wayfarer's rolling deck than I was ashore.

There was little fair-weather sailing for Wayfarer on her way down the coast—just gales and headwinds and slatting sails. But on Saturday, the morning of the start of the race, fortune seemed to smile and we came lickety spit across the foot of Africa to Cape Town.

Seven, eight, nine, ten and even 12 knots registered on the speedometer as Wayfarer took the bit between her teeth in a determined bid to be in at the start.

We knew that the odds against us were 100 to one, but our spirits rose until between 16 and 24 km from Granger Bay we heard the starting gun over the radio and our morale dropped like a stone. For the first time in her history of racing against the clock Wayfarer had lost out.

But we had forgotten our friends ashore.

Over the radio came word that if Wayfarer crossed the line under sail she might then put back into port, re-provision and still be in the race. And the warship returned to its station to establish the imaginary starting line for us.

What a welcome we got in Cape Town, car lights flashed, hooters blared and ships' sirens took up the refrain. Red tape was cut to a minimum and we stumbled ashore into welcoming arms.

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