

# Gale Lashes Dulux Double Cape Fleet

ONLY nine of the 64-boat fleet managed the double rounding of the "Cape of Storms" amid equinoctial gales which raged throughout the Dulux Double Cape Race. The yachts started the 130-mile course simultaneously from Table Bay (RCYC), Hout Bay (HBYC), Simonstown (FBYC and DFSA) and Gordon's Bay (GBYC) at 6pm on Friday night in a wind already registering 40 knots.

The course was to take the fleet round a mark off each of these ports and then back to the finish at their particular home port. Times would then be compared and an overall winner announced.

The boats started in False Bay all got off to a cracking reaching start and the Gordon's Bay boats made quick work of crossing the bay and running downwind from Cape Point to Slangkop, where they were flattened by a South-easter vortex which forced many of them to take refuge in the Hout Bay harbour. Here, in the wind shadow of Chapman's Peak, it was as still as a mill pond . . .

The intrepid starters from Simon's Town fared little better. Making a record crossing of the bay, they approached the twinkling lights off Gordon's Bay amid the spray and spume whipped up by a 50-knot South Easter blast-

## Report: Rob Meek

ing down off the Hottentots Holland. Under these night-time conditions it was almost impossible to spot the small flashing light of the turning mark and soon the fleet was nosing this way and that, looking for the turn-point.

In the search two boats ventured a touch too far to the east and were soon hard aground on the Harmony reef off Gordon's Bay.

Mike Munnik's brand new Saddler 32 spent about 30 minutes with her keel bumping the rocks and heeled over so far that she took water down her main hatch. But her spirited and seasoned crew, with the help of a rising tide, managed to re-float her without substantial damage.

*Tamarin*, Dr John Battersby's Miura, did not escape so lightly and was washed on the reef. A shore-based rescue operation was mounted and the crew were helped ashore with the aid of a line.

The six Hout Bay starters got away without a "wipe out" and went on around the course with *Bright Water Fox* and *My Way* eventually finishing fifth and eighth across the line.

The major portion of the fleet started at the RCYC bridge in Table Bay where a 45-knot wind played merry hell, with boats feverishly taking in reefs and reducing sail.

After screeching down to the breakwater the gale suddenly dropped and a light North-easterly wafted in and the fleet ghosted on towards Hout Bay. But an off-the-clock South-easter was waiting around the Sentinel for the unsuspecting fleet and, before the first mark had been reached, half the fleet had high-tailed it - either for home, or for the calm waters of Hout Bay harbour - not even a mile away from the tempest at the turning mark.

*Impulse*, who went into the long race leading on points in the Timex series, had the misfortune to lose the top section of her mast while well up with the big boats off Hout Bay. Her mast had been suspect for a long time as compression ripples had been evident.

Arthur Stehli's *Letigo 2* also lost her mast in similar high winds off Steenbras Point.

Almost all the retirements occurred within six hours of the starting gun and by daybreak a mere 14 boats were left on the windswept course.

Eric Lehmann's *Halali*, skippered by yours truly, was the first RCYC round Cape Point and, with poled-out no. 2 genoa shot off down-wind, covering the 12 miles to the Simon's Town mark in just under two hours. However, the little L26 *Hors d'Oeuvre*, skippered by Rick Nankin, rounded the Point an hour behind the impact, hoisted spinnaker, and reached Simon's Town on the transom of *Halali* - giving her an average speed of 11.8 knots from the Point!

For the rest it was a race of extremes, gale-force winds at times and then great calm patches in the lee of the mountains along Sea Point and Sandy Bay plus the most frustrating calm in the centre of False Bay.

The first boat home, in 31 hours, was *Hors d'Oeuvre* skippered by the fireball sailor Rick Nankin. Second was *Halali* skippered by Rob Meek and third was John Levin in his L26 *Equation*. All three from RCYC.

They were followed by *Forget-Me-Knot* (GBYC) skippered by Julian Wayne, *Bright Water Fox* (HBYC) skippered by Jan Reuvers, *Windswift* (FBYC) jointly skippered by D J Robertson, *My Way* (HBYC) skippered by D Koenen, *Cape Recife* (DFSA) skippered by Lieutenant John Martin fresh back from the Round Britain Race on *Voortrekker II* and *Kaiamanzi* (FBYC) skippered by G.L. Eglington.

These results are surprising in that it would appear that the smaller boats are more seaworthy than some of the big boys. Of the eight L26's to start four finished and of the three Impact's two finished.

However, the main reason for this strange statistic is that the smaller boats are easier to handle and require far less team work and team spirit in rough weather.

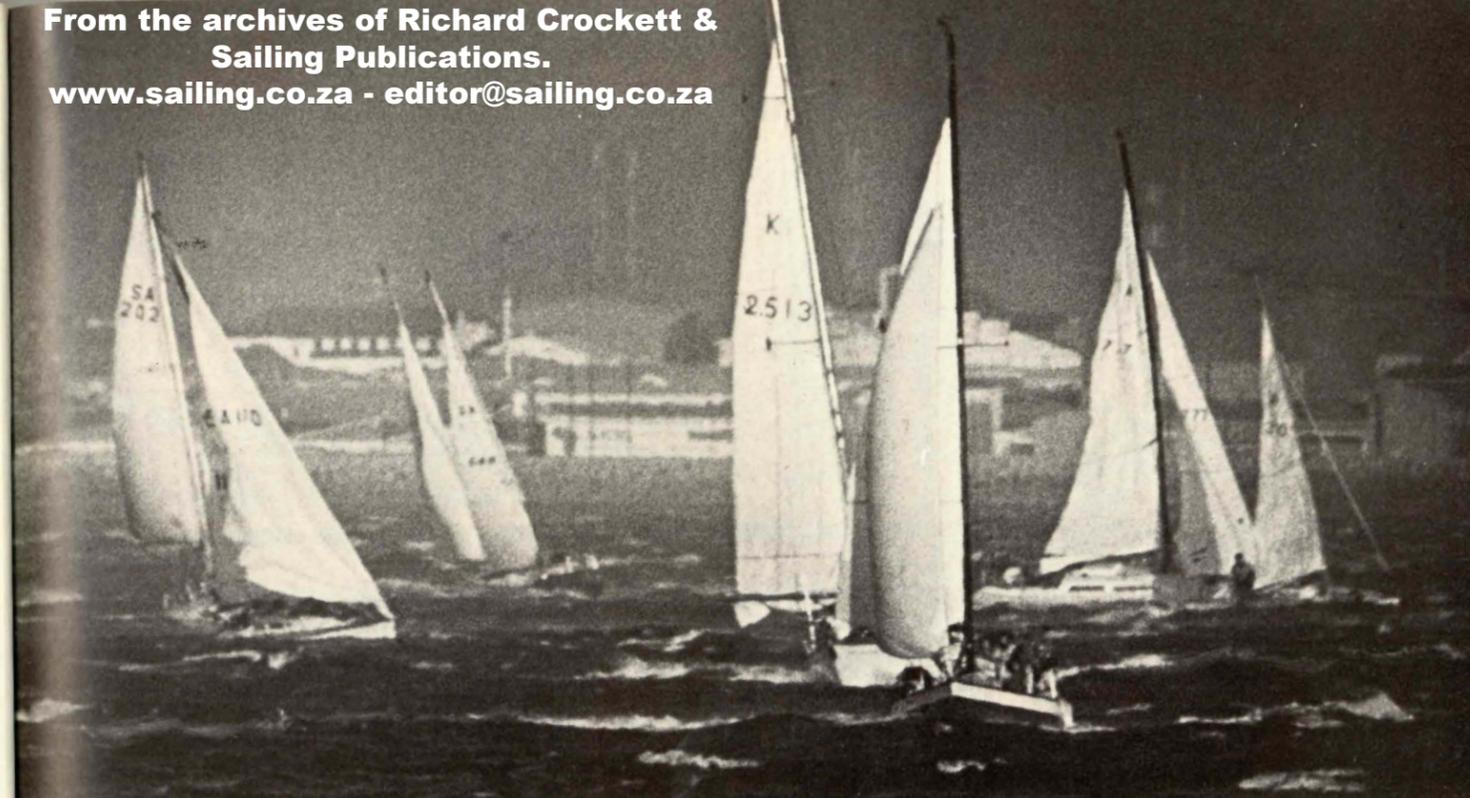
Large two-tonners require eight or nine competent and motivated crew to drive them on a long offshore race in foul weather.

Training and teamwork has to be as good

**TOP LEFT:** The Miura *Tamarin* hard on the rocks in Gordon's Bay after running aground during the night in a 50 knot south-easterly, which had amongst other damage, caused the turning mark to drag dangerously close inshore. Mike Munnik's brand new Sadler 32 was also enticed inshore and spent 30 minutes with her keel bumping the rocks before her crew managed to free her with minor damage.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Maverick winds experienced during the Dulux Double Cape race are here depicted in a photograph of the start at Gordon's Bay in almost windless conditions. The contrast with the start in Table Bay (top) is markedly obvious.

PHOTOS: U TEUTENBERG



ABOVE: Yachts at the Table Bay start of the Dulux Double Cape race had to contend with gale force south easterly winds.

BELOW: Three of the four-man crew aboard *Hors d'Oeuvre*, first boat to finish the gruelling Double Cape course, are from left: Bill Cargill, Andy Rudolph and Steve Wilkinson. Skipper Rick Nankin was absent when the picture was taken.

as any football team. A headsail change should be attacked as vigorously as any rugby scrum and a spinnaker gybe, heel and float drop should happen as effortlessly as a three quarter movement at Newlands.

To reach this level of boat handling our sail training and offshore racing programme must be amended. The fact that 350 crew set sail on Friday evening to bash their way around the Peninsula proves that there is plenty of interest in this type of event and it would seem only prudent to have an overnight race programmed in each of the Point Series events sailed around our coast.

With more regular off-shore sailing, boats can build up crews and equipment to handle our vicious weather and, with more practise and preparation, boat handling will become second nature allowing navigation and tactical sailing to play a more important role than it does at present.

The way new boats are "breeding like rabbits" round our coast-line, there is a pressing need not only for berthing the boats but also crewing them to their optimum. If the future standard of yacht racing in South Africa is to be improved, training, preparation and offshore experience has to be developed vigorously.

## Views from the Winner

IT wasn't an ordinary southeaster gale. There was much more east in the wind than usually - right out of east-south-east. This meant that most skippers found them-

selves bamboozled by violent patches blowing up to 60 knots while the "back-winds", in the lee of the mountains, came from unexpected directions - even those crafty drafts that often blow from Robben Island to Sea Point.

In Hout Bay, where there was no wind, it was blowing 50 knots the other side of a line from the Sentinel and Flora Bay. The fiercest winds were found off Chapman's Peak and Gordon's Bay.

Anyway, Rick Nankin modestly claims it was just a question of sticking it out in the rough stuff and then getting one's breath back and nursing the boat along in the peculiar calms . . .

He did admit, however, that during the night they were knocked flat with the mast in the water three times. Once a crew member was pitched into the mainsail, and from this vantage point managed to get the genny down and relieve the hard-pressed little sloop. Then it was storm jib and double-reefed mainsail all the time . . .

One of the weirdest sights from *Hors d'Oeuvre* was seeing a sloop, completely out of control, skidding sideways and blown by the wind as it lay on its side - right across their course.

Rick claims that his biggest satisfaction came from seeing the race through without having to fight his personal bugbear of seasickness. Few people realise that this tough skipper has this problem even when he is on one of his winning outings!

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