

# VOORTREKKER'S SPEED HAS

# AMAZED EXPERTS

From Our Bureau

London, Tuesday.

**T**O COVER 6,851 miles in 43½ sailing days is pretty good going by any sailing standards — Chichester's included. To do so with the only damage one broken bearing-out pole and one front tooth adrift is little short of miraculous.

But that is the South African ketch Voortrekker's record for her shakedown voyage from Cape Town to Plymouth, a trip that has raised eyebrows in yachting circles at the Devon port where Voortrekker arrived quietly—almost unnoticed—out of the mist, several days before expected.

These circles, including Captain Terence Shaw, secretary of Plymouth's Royal Western Yacht Club which is controlling next month's singlehanded transatlantic race, are ready to admit that in the graceful 50ft. ketch South Africa has a most impressive challenger.

The tooth, incidentally, belonged to Gordon Webb — a crowned molar that unaccountably fell out during the voyage and was hurriedly re-fixed, gratis, by an understanding Plymouth yachting dentist shortly after Voortrekker arrived.

### Uneventful

The bearing-out pole for the spinnaker guy was broken in about the only "hairy" sailing incident of the voyage—and the only time that all three crew, skipper Bruce Dalling, Gordon Webb and Bobby Bongers, had a fight on their hands.

That was when, two days out from the Azores and running before a wind that suddenly freshened to gale force, the yacht's huge spinnaker threatened to take off. For about the only time on the voyage the man on watch had to call for help and, after a lively struggle, the three got the sail down.

Otherwise, as Bruce Dalling said, it was a comparatively uneventful voyage—apart from its speed, that is. The days passed peacefully enough, enlivened by an occasional swim-over the stern on the end of a safety rope, the traditional toast when crossing the line, another formal toast to President Fouche on his installation, radio conversations with Cape Town, and, of course, breaks ashore at St. Helena, Ascension Island, and the Azores.

### Surprised

At Plymouth, all three South Africans could barely conceal their delight and pride over the yacht's performance. The figures are impressive: Voortrekker averaged 158 miles a day; her best day's run was 220 miles, her worst, 83 miles. Admittedly the weather was kind, with very little calm to slow them and not too much sailing into the wind.

Only once did they encounter a Force 8 blow; on one stretch Voortrekker carried full racing sail for nine continuous days; and they were able to use the self-steering gear for nine days.

The journey was done in four stages, with breaks at St. Helena, Ascension, and Norder—in the Azores—of four days, one day, and seven days respectively. Dalling's charts of the voyage show how true and straight was Voortrekker's course—"almost like a mailship's plot," he said.

The ketch's speed at times surprised even these long-experien-

ced sailors. Dalling said: "To stand on the poop when she was really going was quite an experience—almost frightening."

The Azores to Plymouth leg of 1,280 miles took six days 15 hours. The South Africans were expected to take about nine days from the Azores, given reasonable weather.

Perhaps it was just as well they encountered no really bad weather, for conditions aboard were a little cramped. The yacht is not designed to accommodate three on a long voyage. It is essentially built for single-handed sailing with the Atlantic race in mind. However, all went well in the fields of personal relationships. There were no personality clashes.

The three had not crewed together before, but it would be hard to find three yachtsmen in South Africa with a greater total experience.

All three have their own yachts. Webb, an engineer, has also skipped the famous ocean racing ketch, Stormvogel. Bongers is a former South African Flying Dutchman class champion and a professional boat builder.

Dalling, chosen after much deliberation by the Springbok Ocean Racing Trust Fund Committee to sail Voortrekker in the Atlantic race, is a determined, dedicated character — a Natal University graduate with an adventurous background, including a spell as an anti-terrorist fighter in Malaya.

### Pick up

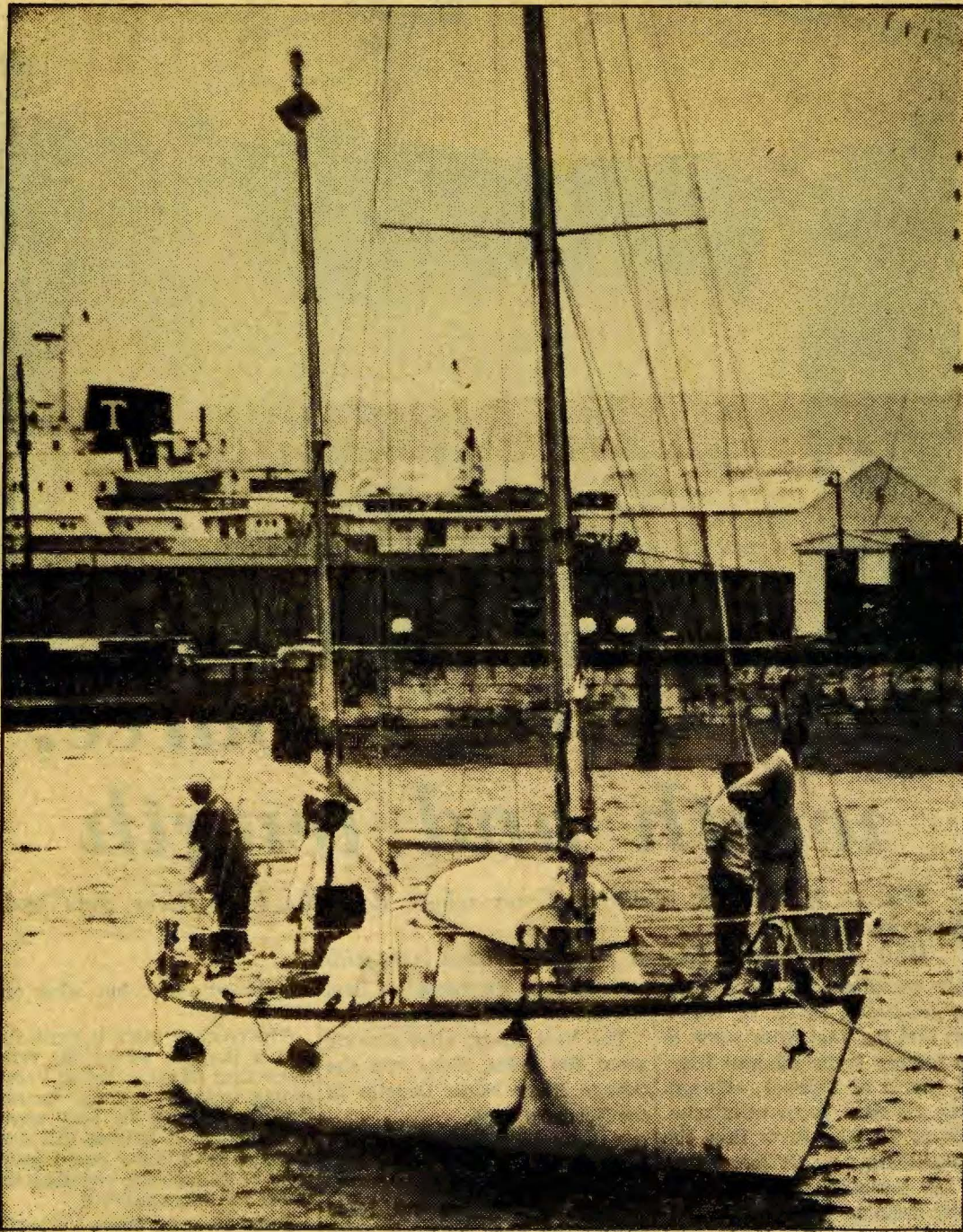
His sailing experience has been concentrated into the last five years, and includes a tough solo voyage from Hong Kong to Durban. Last year he put in a seamen's concentrated crewing in British races, with his sights set on an eventual chance of sailing in the transatlantic race.

Dalling, who is now studying philosophy, said: "I doubt if you could find three more different types, and yet we have hit it off just fine—no upsets at all." That they have become firm friends, have a deep respect for each other, and work as a close-knit team was obvious to all who met them at Plymouth.

Summing up, Dalling said: "The outstanding feature of the voyage was the lack of breakages or gear failure. There were only two moments of panic—the spinnaker incident, and when we lay off Plymouth in a busy shipping channel waiting for the fog to lift. A submarine passed only 50 yards away and we wondered whether, after all those thousands of miles, we were going to get run down on the last mile!"

Now the three have a busy month's preparation ahead of them for the race starting on June 1, including a test or two out in Plymouth Sound and final consultations with Voortrekker's brilliant Dutch designer, Ricus van de Stadt.

Then the three friends will split up—Dalling to face the Atlantic alone, the others to fly back to South Africa, no doubt to listen anxiously to the radio bulletins Dalling hopes to send...



The Voortrekker in Plymouth harbour. From left those on board are: Ricus van de Stadt (designer), Bruce Dalling, Gordon Webb and Bobby Bongers.

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