

A triumphant exit for the Meiring Naude

SHE did not take line honours; nor did she win on handicap.

But when the CSIR's Meiring Naude "got the gun" at the finish line in Durban after the 1989 Crystic Beachcomber Crossing from Mauritius, she was given a right royal welcome from many of the yachts that had made the crossing.

It was no more than the fleet's guardship and her crew deserved, for their part in the safety and success of the often hazardous 2 500 km race cannot be overstated.

The Meiring Naude stood by the stricken Corum, dismasted minutes after the start of the race, kept an eye on The Boss, forced to return to Mauritius with a leaking hull, twice dropped fuel to another dismasted yacht, Spirit of Strehel, twice transferred injured and ill crew members from yacht to ship, and generally advised and encouraged the competitors every day. It was the third Crystic Crossing for the guardship and her skipper, Captain George Foulis.

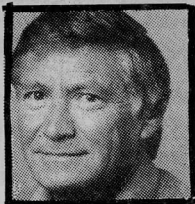
Sadly, this was in all probability, her last. Even sadder is that, at the end of this year, George Foulis' long, unbroken "love affair" with her will come to an end.

For 23 years she has been used for countless scientific projects. Now, government funding has apparently dried up, and CSIR can no longer afford to maintain her. She is due to be sold at the end of the year.

Bearded, blue-eyed Foulis (56), helped with the birth of the Meiring Naude in Durban all those years ago, being involved in the design stages. And, apart from reliefs, she has had no other master. On average, he spends 180 days a year with her at sea. Strangely, for man of the sea, Foulis was born in Johannesburg, where he attended Highlands North school. "But my grandfather was a seafarer, and the sea always attracted

Dave's Beat

Dave Beattie



me," he says.

He did his first sailing on Wemmer Pan as a Sea Scout, and the natural progression took him to the General Botha and the navy. He joined Saffmarine, and became the country's youngest Master, at 23. A spell with Marine Diamonds off the West Coast followed, and then came the CSIR offer.

"It's all very interesting and I have no regrets about being at sea for so long," says the Meiring's Master, who, in his spare time, did yacht deliveries and sailed in the Cape to Rio.

"My employers have been fantastic, so have my crew," he says — and the fact that the crew affectionately call him "father" tells it all.

Chief navigation officer Chris James has been with Foulis for 18 years, Chief engineering officer "Rusty" Kirby and the second engineering officer, Hans van Melsen, for nine. Bosun Absalom Tabete, and crewmen Gerbers Joyisa and Samson Nthetha, have all served on the ship for over 20 years. For all of them, the parting of the ways will be sad.

"I'm hoping the ship will not be lost to scientific research," said the Captain, "and if I have anything to do with it, this won't be the last Crystic Crossing. The races have provided some of the most exciting times."

But Foulis is aware that hope and reality are unlikely to meet. "If it is over, I'm not sure what I will do," said the man whose shore interests include gardening and church work.

"Offers of jobs ashore scare me a bit, and I suppose I'll try to do relief work and the odd yacht deliveries. We'll see what comes along."

Yachtsmen countrywide will wish him well — so do those of us privileged enough to have been aboard the Meiring on this last Crystic Crossing.