

Castaway Ant casts off again

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JOHANNESBURG. — It didn't bother solo round-the-world yachtsman Ant Steward that he was leaving on Friday the 13th to go back to the place where he nearly died to re-start his epic voyage.

A cheerful and chubby Ant said: "No problem. I was born on Friday the 13th anyway ..."

The Durban yachtie and his small open boat, the NCS Challenger, are being taken aboard a freighter to Cerf Island in the Seychelles where this year Ant was shipwrecked and spent nine days as a castaway.

"Sure, I'm pretty scared about going back there. But I'm also worried about getting lowered off the side of the freighter by a bunch of excitable Italian sailors."

Ant's return to finish the last 5 000km leg of his trip — first to Durban, then on to Cape Town — has been put together in a frantic rush to beat the onset of the hurricane season in the Indian Ocean.

"It seems as though it has already started and we can see some worry-

ing weather patterns developing," he said.

Despite the dangers of being caught in the heavy weather — which promises to be worse than at the same time last year because of the disappearance of the El Nino phenomenon — Ant is more concerned about the Durban-Cape Town leg than anything else.

"That's probably the most dangerous part of the whole trip. That coast is probably the most treacherous in the world."

Ant's wife Sue — they married after his rescue and return from Cerf Island — is "not happy at all" about him going back, he acknowledged.

But, even after the end of the voyage in Cape Town, possibly around the end of the year, Ant will be looking for his next challenge — a solo voyage around stormy Cape Horn at the tip of South America.

At least when he finally gets back into the water this time, he will have a few extras with him — his sponsors have provided him with a backpacking mattress. It is the first time he has something to sleep on in the open boat.