

YACHTING

'Been there, seen that, got the T-shirt' – the 3 600 nautical mile Comrades

BY DAVE BEATTIE

The Rothmans Cape to Rio yacht race has often been likened to the Comrades Marathon.

Only a handful of competitors can seriously be considered as potential winners, and while there are also intriguing races within races, the bulk of the field is there simply for the fun and for the sense of personal achievement it offers.

Right now, one could consider Commander Hanno Teuteberg the "Fordyce" of the 3 600 nautical mile run to Rio, since last time out, on Broomstick in 1993, he set the race record of 15 days, three hours and 10 minutes.

When the gun goes off in Table Bay for the start of the 1996 race on Saturday, there will be no Teuteberg,

no Broomstick; but there is at least one contender who has the capacity to sweep the record away, and two others who could upset calculations.

Top of the pile must be the biggest boat in the fleet, Dr Hasso Plattner's new ILC 70, the 24.4 metre Fancourt's Morning Glory.

With waterline length being one of the key determinants of speed across the water, other yachts will be hard pressed to match her speed.

Plattner, who took handicap honours in the 1993 race, is hoping this time, to do the "double."

Two other yachts intend having a say in the chase for line honours – the 18.3m Simonis-designed Warrior, owned by Phil Gutsche and skippered by Rick Nankin, and the Swedish entry Nicorette, a 21.8m IMS Maxi skippered by Ludde Ingvall.

Nicorette won this year's Fastnet in style, but in last week's Rothmans Regatta, sailed off Cape Town, she found Fancourt Morning Glory a handful.

Warrior has a crew confident of taking her to handicap honours if not first to the line.

What she lacks in length she makes up for in design, and Nankin believes his crew has the skill and motivation to keep up the pressure all the way, and to finish in less than 17 days, if all goes according to plan.

While the main winners will come from the IMS class, there are 29 yachts in the monohull cruising category, and nine multihulls.

This year, there is added interest in the form of three "guest runners" – the Whitbread 60s, America's Challenge, Meteorite Corum Watch and

Viper.

Designed specifically for the Whitbread Round the World race, they cannot enter the Rio event, but will use it to test design modifications under race conditions.

To resume the Comrades analogy, most of the sailors will be out there for the romance of it all; of being able to boast, "been there, done that, got the T-shirt".

South Africa's most famous mariner, Bertie Reed, has all the T-shirts. He has not missed a South America race yet, and this time he'll be on the 34 foot Three Ships Whisky.

Voortrekker 2, among the country's most famous and gracious yachts, has been tarted up for the occasion, but the grand old lady has too many miles in her legs to pose much of a threat to her younger,

high-tech opponents.

Among those out there for the fun of it, or the learning experience, are Mike Kopman and his University of Cape Town crew on H2O International, a Stadt 40 built from plywood in 1968.

She is the oldest boat in the fleet. Younger still than the university crew are the schoolboys from Westerford High, who will be aboard Bernhard Diebold's Diel, a 65-foot ketch, a veteran of two Rio races. And then there is Marion Cole, and her all-female crew – the first the race's history – aboard the 40ft Kelly Girl.

The spirit of the race is perhaps best embodied by the determination of a man like Sammy Naidu.

The 53-year-old Capetonian built his 14m ketch in his back yard 14 years ago, and has always dreamed

of competing in the transAtlantic classic.

One of the first entrants this year, Naidu is still seeking sponsorship for some vital upgrading. Right now, there is doubt about the realisation of that dream, but with less than a week to go, he is not ready to concede defeat.

Some of the slower boats are planning to take an early start, but for most, the magic starts on Saturday when, given the right conditions, they'll set off on a mainly downwind, tradewind run, heading north, and then north-west and west, to round Ilha da Trindade, before sliding down to the Sugarloaf.

Some will opt for a more direct route, taking a chance on avoiding the doldrums and putting to the test that fortune favours the brave.