

Former gardener to sail in second Cape-to-Rio

Daily Dispatch Correspondent

CAPE TOWN — A former gardener will be swapping his spade for a winch handle for the second time to sail in the Rothman's Cape-to-Rio race, due to start on Saturday.

Mr Douglas Makhafola, 55, took to the high seas in the 1973 Cape-to-Rio as well.

Introduced to yachting in the early '70s while helping his former employer, Mr Allan Dando, build a yacht in a city backyard, he was part of the crew which crossed the Atlantic nearly 20 years ago.

Mr Dando, based in Knysna, tracked his former gardener down to his workplace in Randburg to invite him again because "he's a super chap" and his sympathetic personality makes him a good crew member.

Mr Makhafola, who now works as a messenger, said he immediately accepted Mr Dando's invitation to sail in this

year's race as he realised he would soon be too old for such adventures.

Mr Makhafola, who is married with four daughters, said he wishes he had a son with whom he could share his passion for sailing.

"I just wish more black people were interested in sailing instead of soccer. If I had the money, I would love to take a holiday and live on the sea," he said.

Mr Makhafola is confident that with its new yacht, Realty-1, the crew will be able to cut seven days off its previous time of 28 days.

His employer in Randburg, Degussa, is paying for his return flight to Cape Town.

● The challenge facing a racing yachtsman in the Cape-to-Rio is a weather phenomenon known as the South Atlantic High — for getting caught in this high pressure system could smash any dream of winning.

Ironically, another crucial tactical decision is the one taken within the first few hours — whether to sail more to the north or the south — a choice which could determine a yacht's final position after more than two weeks at sea.

This week, the notorious Atlantic High is centred around Ilha da Trindade at 20° south and 30° west, about 700 miles north from Rio, an island the yachts have to round.

The trick to win is to sail as close to the centre of the high as possible to get stronger winds — but getting caught in the centre will mean a disastrous end to months of planning and preparation.

But two yachts in the race, Broomstick and Morning Glory, could have a definite edge in tracing the vagaries of a constantly moving Atlantic High — an on-board weather router.

A weather router analyses the satellite weather pictures received on board the yacht and gives a prognosis of what's likely to happen next.