

Marathon across the sea

CAPE TOWN: A record fleet of 21 yachts have entered for the **Bartholomeu Dias Trophy race** from Cape Town to Lisbon.

The 6 000 nautical mile race is one of the longest bluewater contests in the world and known as the "Comrades Marathon" of the South African yacht racing circuit. It is raced along the traditional 15th century trade routes that the courageous Portuguese men o'war took along the West Coast of Africa to corner the fabulously wealthy spice trade.

The race starts in Cape Town on March 21 with a two week stopover in the Azores island some 5 000 nautical miles away, ending in Lisbon. This was the traditional "rest and recreation" stopover for Portuguese seamen of yesteryear returning from the East preparing for the final 1 000 nautical mile dash back home - invariably pursued by English and Spanish pirates.

In the first Dias race in 1988, set to coincide with the 500th anniversary of the Portuguese explorer who discovered South Africa, only six boats entered. The race was won jointly by SADF-crewed Voortrekker I and Prestige Krost skippered by Bertie Reed.

This year the entry figure has more than trebled and the organisers are expecting about 25 boats to be at the starting line in Table Bay on March 31.