

Just no avoiding the Da Gama bug

RICHARD CROCKETT
ON THE WIND

MONDAY
21/4/1999

IT HARDLY seems like a year ago, but the annual da Gama race to East London starts today. This race, is a bit like the Comrades Marathon as once the bug has bitten, it's difficult not to keep at it.

Many people often ask me why I keep doing the race, particularly as it is reputed to be so tough and even dangerous. It's pretty simple to me anyway, being a simple sod that is. It's a bit like walking around with a stone in your shoe - when you take it out it feels really good.

Having bashed your way down the coast, and having sometimes taken a beating from the gods of Bashee, the hot shower and breakfast in East London, plus a few short sharp jubas in the East London Yacht Club, make it all seem worthwhile, and the hardships quickly disappear.

At the final race briefing on Monday night, I was amazed to still see a few of the old faces who competed in first race way back in 1977, and these guys are coming back for their 23rd race this year! Brian Tocknell and his son Neil were there in 1977 when just four boats ventured down the coast, and they will be sailing "Flyer" this time.

Both have missed just one race each, giving them an enviable record.

This year the race has been sponsored by the Ocean Sailing Academy who have breathed some new life into it, and by bringing on new partners in the form of

satellite communications experts Station Africa, and Steve Slatter Insurance who are providing the "eye in the sky" safety fly over, the race has begun to grow in popularity and stature again. Seventeen yachts have entered this year, and from these it is very difficult to predict a winner as conditions on the day are really going to determine form. No one wants the dreaded south westerly wind as this really sorts the men from the boys, and those who can "vasbyt" the longest, will come through. The north easters could see a few well sailed boats sneak through to take the honours.

Robbie Dove sailed "Gumboots" to a stunning victory last year, although he will have to sail really well and hard to repeat that victory.

The L34s have not won the race on handicap for a while now, and both "Point Blank" and "Solar Wind" will be looking for victory.

The long range met forecast shows a few coastal lows developing, but these could quite easily go out to sea, and have little effect other than producing light conditions or some good north easters which everyone will revel in.

I am sailing with "old man" Dave Cox aboard "Solar Wind". Having sailed the last six races aboard big boats, it is going to be very different sailing on a 34-footer.

However, last time I sailed with Dave Cox was on board "Magic Carpet" in 1980, and we won the race, so lets hope that my influence aboard can see us repeat that victory!

**Archives of Richard Crockett
& Sailing Publications.**

www.sailing.co.za - editor@sailing.co.za