



Old salts: Two of South Africa's most well-known yachtsmen, John Martin and Bertie Reed, sail together probably for the last time during a race in Table Bay.

Old sailing rivals team up for a day to remember

3/4/2006 Argus

HENRI DU PLESSIS
Staff Reporter

WHEN they sailed alone over so many miles, they saw the sea in torment so often.

But when they sailed together for the first time in years on Saturday, veteran solo yachtsmen Bertie Reed and John Martin had a duck pond and a breeze on which to share their memories.

Martin and Reed joined forces on the South African Navy's MTU Fascination of Power in the Royal Cape Yacht Club's seniors day yacht race to turn the day into a special reunion.

The two men are already in the record books and the history books for their exploits at sea when they raced for glory in the premier solo round the world races of the 1980s.

At sea they were tough, sometimes bitter, rivals as the two South Africans not only took on the best lone sailors in the world, but also each other.

But the last race in which they were pitted against each other, the 1990/91 BOC Challenge, Reed had to divert from his course as he rushed to save Martin from his sinking boat in the southern ocean. In that race, Martin was among the leaders and Reed among the bunch, when Martin's yacht collided with

an ice "growler", a block of Antarctic ice floating just under the sea's surface, and started sinking.

"We were so competitive then. We were single-minded, win-at-all-cost people who did not care about anything else," Martin remembered.

"I had family, commitments, on land, but I just switched it off," Reed said.

"Everything just went about racing and winning. It was often an uphill battle. We had to struggle to get anything, from money to equipment, but we did it."

Reed, the senior of the two, does not sail as often as Martin, who is leading a South African Navy programme to teach the art of sailing to young people.

"I mostly keep myself busy with my woodwork, my restaurant and my garden," Reed said. "I have a little yacht I sail or motor around in and I'd like to do the next Simon's Town Yacht Club race if I can."

But both men are quick with an answer when asked if they'd like to do it all again.

"If he said no, I'd have been the first to call him a liar," Reed laughed as he referred to Martin.

"Of course we'd want to, but we have to be sensible. I cannot tell a sponsor that I'd be able to go out there and win," Martin said.

"Sometimes, I get these thoughts going around my head. How about John and I doing a two-star race together? A two-man race over 3 000 miles? But these are just thoughts going through my mind, that's all," Reed said.

And what are their best memories?

"Oh, there are so many, like seeing Cape Horn for the first time. Like coming second to Philippe Jeantot in the first BOC with old Voortrekker," Reed remembered.

"I'd say it was the time in 1986 when I got to Cape Town first in Voortrekker II and the admiral asked me if I'd like to do it for a living," Martin enthused.

"But today, too. I am very grateful to have had the chance to sail with Bertie Reed on a lovely day like this. It was fantastic to have had Bertie on the boat."

"Yes, it was a lovely day," Reed agreed.

BRENTON GEACH