

True grit, Voortrekker-style



A kiss for John Martin from girlfriend Lynne Morrow

A GAME John Martin, sailing the sleek blue-and-white Mainstay Voortrekker against some of the most sophisticated yachts in modern racing, proved once again last week that what South Africans lack in hi-tech, they make up for in grit and determination.

Mainstay Voortrekker was the second mono-hulled boat to cross the finish line at Newport, Rhode Island, US, after 17 days 22 hours and two minutes on the stormy North Atlantic.

She was the twelfth overall to finish in a flotilla of 92 boats, and the last to beat the record set in 1980 by the winner of the last Observer/Europe 1 single-handed trans-Atlantic race.

For Voortrekker's skipper, a lieutenant-commander in the SA Navy, the voyage was a constant struggle against equipment failure, foul weather and the knowledge that his major competitor, the radically advanced Thursday's Child, was speeding farther and farther ahead.

Thursday's Child, skippered by American Warren Luhrs, and built at a cost of \$750 000 (R910 000) was the first monohull to cross the line.

Gadgetry

Equipped with everything from solar panels to complex computerised navigation, Thursday's Child easily beat the two-year-old Voortrekker, which depends more on old-fashioned seamanship than high-tech gadgetry.

For the first nine days of the race, Voortrekker managed to stay ahead of her

rival, but at dawn on the tenth day, Thursday's Child drew astern of the South African boat.

"I was sailing like crazy, trying to make the most of the light wind," Martin said. "And there was Warren standing on the deck fiddling with his camera. By nightfall, Thursday's Child had disappeared over the horizon."

After that, Voortrekker's skipper pushed his boat to the limit, trying to catch up. But when Martin heard that Thursday's Child was 60 hours ahead of him, he knew he could not make it.

His goal then was to beat the 1980 record. Voortrekker squeaked in with only one hour and 14 minutes to spare.

When John greeted his ecstatic girlfriend, Lynne Morrow, shortly after crossing the finish line just after five o'clock on a picture-perfect Wednesday morning, he was beyond exhaustion.

He had lost his self-steer-

ing in a gale two days before, and for 48 hours could not leave Voortrekker's wheel.

"To keep myself awake I put on my Sony Walkman and blasted my head off, but I was close to the shore and I couldn't hear the foghorns."

"So I took it off and fell asleep, only to wake up a few minutes later to find myself going in circles."

For John the last night of the race was the worst.

"For the first time I began to talk to myself," he said. "I had an hallucination that someone else was on the boat. I kept saying 'For God's sake, pump the bilges.'"

One of John's constant worries on the voyage was that Voortrekker was taking on too much water.

Off the coast of Newfoundland, the boat had sprung a leak when it struck a submerged object — either a whale or a "growler," the sailor's name for an iceberg. From then on the skipper had to empty the boat of three buckets of water an hour.

Disappointed

It was not his only concern. "Every day I woke up and wondered what would go wrong," he said. "It's amazing how survival can make a person like me, who isn't machine-minded, concentrate on all kinds of technical problems."

John was clearly disappointed that he had come in second, but was loyal to his boat.

"I wouldn't write Voortrekker off," he said. "She stands an excellent chance of beating Thursday's Child in the BOC round-the-world race in 1986."

"After spending 18 months sleeping, eating and thinking about this race, I can't believe it's all over," he said.

Ironically, after crossing the Atlantic, John, who heads the navy's navigation school,

PATRICIA CHENEY
reports from
Newport, Rhode
Island

John Martin shows what determination can achieve

sailed Voortrekker up the wrong channel, almost missing Newport.

Happily, it did not take the edge off the greeting given to the tanned and exhausted skipper by Yorkshire-born Lynne and Voortrekker's manager, retired commodore Roy Kingon.

Lynne, a cardio-thoracic nurse at Cape Town's new City Park Hospital, has been a fixture in John's life for the past 18 months. She has lived in South Africa for eight years.

"I am so proud of him," she beamed, barely able to stop hugging the returned hero.

Designer

John was not the only South African to gather accolades at Newport. Two of the first four boats to cross the finish line were designed by John Shuttleworth, who has a degree in electronic engineering from the University of Cape Town.

Shuttleworth designed the trimaran Fleury Michon, which was placed second overall in the race, and Travacrest Seaway, which came in fourth.

The overall winner of the race was the French trimaran Umupro Jardin, skippered by Yvon Fauconnier.

Although Umupro Jardin crossed the line after Fleury Michon, it was awarded first place after Fauconnier was given 16 hours for stopping to help a capsized competitor near the beginning of the race.

A tired, but determined, John Martin sails into Newport at the helm of the second mono-hulled boat to cross the transatlantic finish line



1984 06 24 - Sunday Times

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