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Race One: 1973-74

Portsmouth - Cape Town - Sydney - Rio de Janeiro – Portsmouth

Distance: 27,000nm

Winner: Sayula II



There was a feeling of apprehension and nervous exhilaration on September 8, 1973 as 17 race yachts, carrying 167 crew from seven different nations, left Portsmouth on the first leg of a brand new sporting contest.

The yachts, ranging from the 1936-built Peter Von Danzig of Germany, to the UK's Burton Cutter, which was still being finished during the race, were similar to many of the 3,000 spectator boats that set out to witness the historic start. Crews were mostly adventure-driven novices, with limited experience of offshore sailing and no idea what lay ahead.

Most of the skippers, by contrast, had thousands of sea miles under their belts; skippers like Chay Blyth, a sergeant of the British Army who first achieved notoriety in 1966 when he rowed the Atlantic with Captain John Ridgeway in a six-metre dory. Two years before the start of the Whitbread, he became the first person to sail non-stop westwards around the world, making him a household name. Onboard Great Britain II, Blyth had a crew of



'Red Berets' from the parachute regiment, all of them supremely fit and known for withstanding the toughest challenges, but not known for their sailing skills.

Since the idea for the race had grown out of discussions at the Royal Naval Sailing Association, it was no surprise that the British Armed Forces were well represented with three entries, but there were two others from Britain. Ex-naval yachtsman Les Williams headed Burton Cutter, and Roddy Ainslie - father of Ben, the future Great Britain Olympic sailing legend - had put together the Second Life syndicate with his brother-in-law, Ian Butterworth, and found 12 crewmembers willing to pay £3,000 each for the experience. The entire campaign would cost £40,000.

From the French navy there was Eric Tabarly, who was already a national sporting hero. He had bought and restored an old Fife Cutter in the 1960's, naming her Pen Duick, and was now on his sixth upgrade - a powerful 22-metre ketch- but her depleted uranium keel had been outlawed by the race authorities and his qualification at the start was uncertain. Four other French boats lined up at the start along with three from Italy, two from Poland and one each from Germany and South Africa .

All the crewmembers on Peter Von Danzig were either students or graduates from Akademischer-Segler-Verein - a sailing school - and had to pay £500 to compete, also having put in between 3,000 and 4,000 hours to prepare the boat. The old yacht had once been used by the Germans in 1945 to flee from the Soviets in Danzig and now it was set for another adventure.

The crew on Polish entry Otago were workers from a Gdansk shipyard. Skippered by Zdzislaw Pienkawa, the Otago crew also included his daughter, Iwona, who at 19 was the youngest female in the fleet and one of only three women to complete all four legs of the race.

From Mexico came Ramon Carlin, a 50-year-old self-made millionaire who had built up a huge conglomerate manufacturing washing machines and other household goods. His Swan 65, Sayula II, was one of the few yachts to have a freezer and full-time cook on board, allowing his crew to dine on steaks and chicken each day, washed down with beer and fine wine.

Provisions reflected the way each skipper viewed that first race. Ainslie was offered 1,500 cans of Guinness from his sponsor, but took only a few, preferring instead to have the rest shipped out to Cape Town. Blyth insisted on freeze-dried food and allowed one spoon per crewmember, while French boat Grand Louis, like Sayula II, ate fresh meat all race. The sailors on French ketch Kriter drank wine with every meal. On Carlin's boat, the crew reckoned they got through six bottles of wine each day.

Added to the mattresses, pyjamas, books and stereos, many of the boats did not want for creature comforts. But life in general would be far from comfortable for the next 27,500 nautical miles.

Leg 1 - Portsmouth to Cape Town

The reality of offshore sailing's dangers was shown early on when Great Britain II was hit at night by a ferocious squall just a few days out from Portsmouth. Bernie Hosking was thrown overboard, but after a frenzied search his head was picked out in the searchlight's beam. The seas were cold and rough, but he was pulled back on deck by the other crewmembers and given a hot, rather than a 'stiff' drink. There was no brandy to administer since Blyth was operating a 'dry' boat, but that was to change in subsequent legs.

"I decided it would be good for the crew if we had drinks on the boat so from the second leg, I started a 'happy hour' every night where every crewmember was given the choice of either two beers or two shots of spirits. We used it as an opportunity to catch up on the day's event – it was good for team morale."

There were problems elsewhere. In the rush to get Burton Cutter ready for the race, the outlet pipes for the toilets had not been connected and the stench became unbearable when all the human sewage was dumped directly into the bilge.

If that was unfortunate, a worst fate befell Eric Tabarly's Pen Duick VI, which became the first boat to suffer a dismasting in the Whitbread Race. There was no possibility of repairs so a jury rig was built and the crew headed to Rio de Janeiro, some 1,200 miles to the south-east. By the time they arrived, a new spar had been flown in from France and after it was fitted Pen Duick VI set off across the Atlantic once more, arriving two days before the restart.

Tracking the boats in those early, pre-GPS editions of the race was somewhat difficult. The boats navigated by sextant and dead reckoning and reported their position by radio once a week.

"Most of time, we had no clue where we were," admitted Ainslie, the Second Life skipper. "The readings we took using our instruments gave us a rough idea, but it was only when we were 50 miles from a coastline, when we could tune in to the radio direction finder using our receivers that we had any precise information and obviously there weren't too many times when we were 50 miles from a coastline."

Despite the lack of accurate tracking software, it was clear that Burton Cutter was a class apart in that first leg. Williams' crew was the first to cross the finish line in Cape Town,



though it was the Royal Navy's Adventure, skippered by Patrick Bryans, who won overall on handicap after arriving just three hours ahead of Blyth's GBII.

Leg 2 - Cape Town to Sydney

If the first leg was seen as a bit of a blast, the second quickly turned into a reality check as the fleet were subjected to a battering as soon as they hit the Southern Ocean.

Burton Cutter started to break up and was forced into Port Elizabeth for repairs. Re-welding had to be done three times before she could go back in the water and so she had to withdraw from leg two.

Onboard Tauranga, Paola Chamaz was at the wheel with Paul Waterhouse, a British Army corporal who had sailed the first leg on British Soldier. Waterhouse went below to light a cigarette and as he came back up Tauranga broached violently. The spinnaker boom broke at the mast end causing it to thrash around on the clew of the sail. He rushed forward to get the sails under control and retrieve what was left of the boom, but as he went the boat changed direction once more and the sail suddenly took off. The sheets went taut under Waterhouse and threw him in the air, dumping him back on deck and then overboard.

They searched for almost four hours without success. Since he made no effort to grab a lifeline when he came down, it is likely he was unconscious when he went overboard and would have drowned immediately.

"We all set off knowing that when you are sailing around the world, there would be situations that would be life-threatening or where lives would be lost," said Ainslie. "But it changed the way we did things on Second Life. The crew became more aware of the dangers and started wearing life lines."

Three days later, as the fleet battled against gales and heavy seas 350 miles west off the Kerguelen Islands, 33 Export skippers Dominique Guillet and Jean-Pierre Millet decided to replace the foresail with a smaller one. During the manoeuvre, they were hit by a huge breaking wave which slammed the boat over to starboard. Guillet was missing.

They spent 30 minutes looking for him, but deteriorating conditions forced Millet to abandon the search to preserve the safety of boat and crew. They withdrew from the race, the crew traumatised by Guillet's death.

The passage south, deep into the Southern Ocean, inevitably took its toll on the boats. Adventure suffered problems with her rudder, depriving her crew of a second leg victory, and GBII lost her mizzen mast. Otago also lost the top section of her mizzen mast.

Despite these dramas, Sayula II won the leg on handicap though it was Tabarly who took line honours on Pen Duick VI, setting a new 24-hour record of 305 miles.

It had been a gruesome leg. Two men were dead and the fleet had been given a rude awakening, which changed the mood from one of cavalier excitement to a grim determination to complete their ordeal.

Leg 3 - Sydney to Rio de Janeiro

The drama continued into the third leg. Within a few miles of leaving Sydney, Pen Duick VI was dismasted for the second time in the race.

Also, for the second time, Bernie Hocking disappeared overboard GBII. This time, with winds blowing Force 5-6, the crew did not recover him despite a search that lasted more than two hours.

In his log, Blyth wrote: "Other yachts would have taken this harder or more emotionally. The reason it not affecting us so much is that once again the training of the Paras comes out. You're steeled towards death. All of us in the yacht have seen active service so have seen death before. This is more personal, but we keep our thoughts to ourselves. He will rarely be mentioned now, more out of respect than anything else. Bernie was one of us. He wouldn't want it any other way."

Blyth and his crew expressed their loss by sailing the boat hard and fast to Rio, taking line honours for the first time in the race.

The passage through the Southern Ocean provided the crews with their most memorable moments of the race though some claimed it was monotonous and boring. "One comes in from the cockpit, little is said, one eats, one sleeps, one goes one degree only further than animal existence," wrote one crewmember in the Sayula II log.

Indeed, this monotony caused something of a problem. In recalling this first race, Sayula II's Butch Dalrymple-Smith spoke of mutinies on three boats and the instance on one boat where a crewmember was disarmed after waving a knife at the skipper.

The focal point of the leg was always going to be Cape Horn. The most famous landmark of them all filled many crews with dread. In 1973 the number of sporting yachts that had survived this rounding numbered less than 10. That number would be more than doubled when the Whitbread fleet passed through.

At Cape Horn, HMS Endurance was standing by to ensure a safe passage through some of the most treacherous waters on the planet. The more macho crews felt it was wet nursing gone too far. Others claimed this was progress (presumably not the Naval crew on Adventure, whose headsail was pierced by a wad of a blank round fired by HMS Endurance as a salute to their colleagues).

As it transpired, this was not to be the most ferocious of Horn roundings. The ride there had not been the downwind slide many had expected – though there were sightings of 150-metre tall icebergs – and only Second Life, flattened by a heavy, cold squall, had a horror story to share from the passage.

The Cape behind them, the fleet turned north towards the warmth of Rio de Janeiro. Blyth's GBII was the first to finish, followed by Second Life and Sayula II, but most arrived in time for Carnival, which was everything the brochure had promised. For the first time in five months, the crews could forget about racing and get down to some heavy partying.

Leg 4 - Rio de Janeiro to Portsmouth

The start on the last leg had been staggered. Organisers understood the power of publicity and it was felt this would be maximised if all the boats finished at the same time so the larger boats started later than the smaller ones. This led to major grief among skippers in the larger boats, who felt the measure was unfair, and staggered starts were, thereafter, scrapped.

In any case, interest at the finish was guaranteed by the proximity of Adventure to the top of the podium. To win the overall race, the British Navy entry Adventure had to beat its Mexican rival Sayula II by three and a half days.

With 1,600 miles to go to Portsmouth, Adventure was becalmed for six hours, but then began to make progress in the right direction.

Sayula II was hampered by rigging problems, but kept it quiet from the rest of the fleet. On the approach home, Adventure made good use of local knowledge – off the Isle of Wight she was nearly becalmed and in a foul tide, so dropped anchor with only 37 miles to go to the finish. Then she got some wind to go south of Wight in the darkness and



crossed the finish line in third place, which gave them the overall runner-up prize. Sayula II arrived in fourth place to take the first Whitbread Trophy title.

First over the line, five days earlier, was Blyth's GBII, completing the course in 144 days which was a record for a round-the-world passage at that time. His aim had been to win line honours for each leg, realising that the handicap system did not favour GBII for overall victory. On three of the four legs, she was the fastest boat and on corrected time, she finished sixth.

As one of the only boats with a sponsor (Jack Hayward, the multimillionaire businessman), Blyth was keen for a good show in the media, but arriving home on Maundy Thursday scuppered his plans for a big publicity drive since no newspapers were published on Good Friday.

Completing the circumnavigation placed the crews in an elite group of sailors. Blyth was already a member, but years later he said the race had opened his eyes in more ways than one. "When we came back to Portsmouth, we had a debriefing where we all talked about what had gone right and what had gone wrong in the race. I decided to let someone else take it, but was a bit shocked when I heard the crew talk about my leadership. They said that I dished out the praise when it was needed, but that I was too quick to criticise. I wasn't happy to hear that, but I have never forgotten it so the whole experience was very useful as well as being a lot of fun."

In all, some 324 people had taken part in that first race, with three never returning home. Their experiences would shape the future of the event.

Race Two: 1977-78

Portsmouth - Cape Town - Auckland - Rio de Janeiro – Portsmouth

Distance: 26,780mn

Winner: Flyer



Four years on and already the Whitbread Trophy had become one of the most coveted titles in offshore racing. This time, 15 yachts with 168 crew representing 12 nations jostled for the best position on the Portsmouth start line, with 1973 winner Ramon Carlin, the Mexican washing machine millionaire, firing the gun to send them on their way. Their exit from the Solent was accompanied once more by thousands of spectator boats, including cross-Solent ferries, British warships and a vast fleet of yachts and dinghies.

Chay Blyth had surrendered his place at the helm of 23-metre ketch GBII to Rob James, a competitor in the first race, and new contenders included the much-fancied Flyer, skippered by Dutch industrialist Cornelis van Rietschoten, and Heath's Condor, commissioned specially for the race by solo sailing pioneer Robin Knox-Johnston and Les Williams. They had fitted a revolutionary new carbon-fibre mast to maximise Heath's Condor's speed in the strong following winds that prevailed around the 27,000-mile race course. She was late on the water – her mast was stepped just weeks before the start – and there would be consequences. But the crew was impressive and included a tall, aggressive Kiwi called Peter Blake, who had sailed with Les on Burton Cutter in 1973

and who, at the age of 29, was already recognised as an extraordinary talent on any boat, in any waters.

For the first time, entries included a female skipper. Britain's Clare Francis had captured people's hearts during the 1976 Observer single-handed Transatlantic Race and her Swan 65 ketch ADC Accutrac, which featured two other women in her crew, was seen as a strong contender. Francis was the first in a distinguished line of petite Englishwomen, followed by Tracy Edwards and Ellen MacArthur, who over the next 30 years were to blaze remarkable new trails in international yacht racing.

Elsewhere, 33 Export were back and led by Alain Gabbay who, at just 23, was the youngest skipper in the race's short history. He was out to make a point.

The scene was set for a fierce race between teams better prepared than their predecessors. But there was also a greater onus on safety in the wake of the three tragedies of the opening edition. Safety regulations had been published way back in May 1975 to allow teams greater opportunity to make changes, and it was made compulsory for boats to fit jackstays the length of each boat. It never going to be possible to entirely safeguard the sport from danger – as would be seen – but it was greeted as a positive step.

Leg 1 - Portsmouth to Cape Town

Within a few hours, crews on Heath's Condor and ADC Accutrac were busy on the sewing machines, patching up spinnakers that had blown during their opening manoeuvres. It could have been worse for Flyer, who one night shortly after the start were forced to take evasive action when a small, unlit vessel appeared in their path.

The rest of the leg appeared to pass with less bother for Flyer, who negotiated a 200-mile wide section of the Doldrums in two days, but for the rest of the fleet it was the usual business of damages and repairs.

Some 20 days into the race, having encountered serious headwinds after emerging from the Doldrums, the problems on Heath's Condor suddenly turned critical. With an ear-splitting crack, the new carbon-fibre mast snapped off just above the spreaders.

"For a moment the whole crew were stunned," Knox-Johnston recalled in his book *Last But Not Least*. "As the watch below came up to see what was going on, they just gazed disbelievingly at the mess as the realisation of what this meant dawned. All the hard work to get the boat finished in time had been thrown away in a moment. Gone was any chance of getting to Cape Town first on handicap or even just getting there first. Gone perhaps were our chances in the whole race – they lay in a tangled heap on the deck."

No one was hurt but Heath's Condor retired from the leg and headed straight to the nearest port, Monrovia, some 400 miles away on the west coast of Africa. They spent 10 days replacing the carbon-fibre mast with an aluminium version and sampling the local food, which two days after returning to the race track, took its revenge by wiping out almost every crewmember with a grisly bout of food poisoning.

Japy-Hermes also had their share of angst. The French yacht was forced to stop in Recife, Brazil because a crewmember needed urgent medical attention for kidney stones.

After escaping the Doldrums with a healthy lead, Flyer beat into Cape Town harbour to win the leg. Just two hours behind after 38 days of racing was King's Legend. Six days later, 12 boats were safely tied up at the Royal Cape Yacht Club with the other three, which had all made harbour calls, on their way.

Leg 2 - Cape Town to Auckland

Organisers scrapped Sydney as the second stopover in favour of Auckland, taking the boats further south and closer to the ice fields of the Southern Ocean. Within a week of starting, an iceberg warning was broadcast as temperatures plummeted and a thin coating of ice started to form on the rigging.

John Ridgeway on Debenhams surged south in a bid to gain the lead, but a few days later he was surrounded by pack ice and icebergs. His problems were compounded by a ferocious Force Nine gale. Debenhams gave up any hope of a podium place when Ridgeway issued an 'all hands on deck' command in an attempt to find a path out of danger, taking them off course.

On GBII, the heating failed when the gas stopped vaporising in the heater. John Deane used his motor bike helmet to keep his head warm and prevent injury as ice started to fall from the rigging. Also in the middle of the Southern Ocean, the crew on Kings Legend discovered a serious leak around the rudder post. Surrounding yachts were alerted and rescue plans were drafted, but after two days it was reported that all was well. The news was not so good for Gauloises II, who also suffered a rudder failure and returned to Port Elizabeth for a week of repairs. Upon returning to the track she was caught in stormier weather than the rest of the fleet and her late arrival in this one leg scuppered what turned out to be a serious tilt at the title.

Again, it was Heath's Condor who became the leg two showstoppers with a drama that filled race followers with horror. Just after noon on 13 November, Bill Abram was tidying the foredeck following a gybe, when the spinnaker filled and the lazy guy tautened beneath him. He was flung into the air and hurled into the sea. Someone threw him a line,

but it tangled, so someone else threw a lifebuoy that Bill was able to hang onto. The spinnaker came down and three crew were instructed to keep their eyes on Bill's yellow oilskins while Blake turned on the engine to bring the boat round into the wind. But the propeller had seized and all the while Bill was drifting further from the boat, his position marked only by a cluster of seabirds circling above him. By cranking up the engine, Blake managed to unlock the blades and the Scotsman was ultimately hauled back on deck. Apart from suffering a cut hand he was pronounced fit by onboard medic, Dr David Dickson.

Dickson was back in action a few hours later, this time radioing advice to Nick Dunlop and Rob James on GBII who had both suffered injury when a line had jammed around their waist and legs, leading to burst blood vessels, severe pain and, in the case of Dunlop, unconsciousness.

It had been a torrid passage for Heath's Condor so far, but as compensation the weather gods blessed the remainder of their trip to Auckland and, on November 25, they crossed the finish line first. Thirty-one hours behind, GBII came in second. King's Legend beat Flyer, while 33 Export came in fifth, winning the leg by eight hours on handicap.

Leg 3 - Auckland to Rio de Janeiro

The fleet set off on Boxing Day for another savage dogfight in hostile waters and it wasn't long before Alain Gabbay and 33 Export was in trouble. It had been blowing around 45 knots when there was a 'tremendous bang' and the boat rolled.

All the contents of the chart table had emptied into the toilet. There were spanners, files and screwdrivers embedded in the deckhead of the galley, floorboards had come loose and battery boxes had smashed the floor of the saloon. They worked out the boat must have rolled 140 degrees.

On Adventure they had to start pumping when water came flooding in below deck, though with all the slamming and lurching it took four days to work out that it was coming through two cracks in the hull. "Although the condition never became critical it was very worrying not knowing how far the problem would deteriorate," reported skipper Ian Bailey-Willmot. Even more worrying when they realised they were thousands of miles from the nearest port.

A row broke out over the airwaves when it was found that Pen Duick VI was ineligible because of her depleted uranium keel, though by the time the news reached Eric Tabarly the word 'ineligible' had been replaced by 'disqualified', which created confusion among

the fleet and a rumpus in the French media, who thought their hero had been unfairly treated.

Back on the water, GBII was first round Cape Horn having had some skirmishes with icebergs and growlers on the approach. Flyer was next, rounding in a blinding snowstorm.

The drama continued when 33 Export broached while running under spinnaker in the South Atlantic. Water surged across her decks, slamming Eric Letrosne against the life-rails with such force it fractured his leg. It needed urgent attention so when the call for medical help went out, Dr Jean Louis Sabarly on Japy-Hermes reported they were preparing for a rendezvous. When a huge swell prevented a transfer, Dr Sabarly jumped into the sea and swam to 33 Export, where he looked after his patient until the boat docked and a transfer to hospital was completed. This bravery earned Sabarly the trophy for outstanding seamanship, presented by the Shipwrecked Mariners Society.

On January 28, GBII crossed the line in Rio half an hour ahead of Heath's Condor. On corrected time, Gauloises II won the leg and Flyer was second. They had all been pipped to the post by Pen Duick VI, who arrived in Rio first by several days but was ineligible for honours. The committee invited Tabarly to carry on to Portsmouth and although he declined at first he later changed his mind.

Leg 4 - Rio de Janeiro to Portsmouth

There was plenty of dancing and carousing in Rio – tear gas was used to end one party attended by the sailors - but eventually it all had to stop and the crews once more had to prepare for the final push, a relatively short 5,500-mile hike across the Atlantic. The crew changes had been widespread as incompatibilities became irreparable though Clare Francis was unique in holding onto the same personnel all the way round the world.

In the early stages of the last leg, the heat proved a severe test and on Heath's Condor there was a major egg crisis. Eggs bought in Rio were found to be infested with maggots and skipper Knox-Johnston ordered an immediate fumigation, which was duly launched with a match being applied to the polystyrene egg boxes, without much consideration for the crew's effects and bedding, which were left blackened and reeking of barbecued resin.

Bad eggs apart, the final leg proved uneventful though the competition remained fierce as crews pulled out all the stops to maintain or improve their rankings.



"Life on board is very pleasant though a little dull," reported Gerard Dijkstra on Flyer, which was so far ahead of the rest of the fleet on handicap that a risk-free strategy prevailed throughout the passage.

It was only when the fleet arrived in the English Channel that the conditions suddenly changed. The seas became steep and an angry storm, varying between Force Nine and 10, swept through the front-runners with an alarming brutality.

It was Flyer, lying in fifth place on the leg, that came off worse and suffered a uncontrolled gybe, the spinnaker being blown to pieces. Cornelis van Rietschoten was helming and recovered quickly to get back on track until they were struck by another 55-knot squall which pushed them sideways towards the shore. Witnessed by thousands of well-wishers who had turned out in a flotilla of yachts, the 11th hour action proved dramatic as Flyer headed for the rocks, with just 200 yards to go to the finish. Remarkably, a flurry of sail changes saw the boat veer away from danger and hurtle close-hauled over the line to give the Dutchman an emphatic 58-hour victory on handicap. Gauloises II had earlier won the leg on corrected time, her second of the event, but was left to rue her second-leg calamity as she finished sixth in the final standings.

Race Three: 1981-82

Portsmouth - Cape Town - Auckland - Mar del Plata - Portsmouth

Distance: 26,095nm

Winner: Flyer



Cornelis van Rietschoten, who made such an impression on the 1977 Race, returned to defend his title, sparing little expense in the pursuit of victory by building a brand new yacht with the stated aim of crossing every finish line first and winning the race on handicap. He also invited some exciting new talent, including a young Kiwi called Grant Dalton, to help him with his mission.

Experiences gathered from competitors, officials and sponsors in the previous two races were analysed and used to shape the changes for the third event. The upshot was a massive hike in the number of entries – almost double to 29 - reflecting both the growing integrity of the event and its increasing prestige.

For the first time, organisers had their toes dipped into the thorny world of sporting politics when the British government, having signed the Gleneagles Agreement banning sporting contact with South Africa, withdrew their Ministry of Defence facility HMS Vernon as berthing centre for race assembly after discovering the first leg would finish in Cape Town.



“Margaret Thatcher had hardly got into office before she started banning the naval establishments from helping the Whitbread race,” said Rear Admiral Charles Williams, the chairman of the Race Committee. “She instructed her ministers not to attend any of our functions and asked doctors and dentists not to get involved. The government put pressure on us to take Cape Town off the race course and put a ban on South African entries. But we resisted.”

Berthing was made available at Camper & Nicholson's marina on the other side of the harbour. On the other side of the Atlantic, Rio was removed from the race track due to the unhelpful weather patterns and a legacy of ill-feeling between the crews and the exclusive yacht club at late Clube Rio de Janeiro, caused in part by the Carnival celebrations of the previous edition. It was replaced by Mar del Plata, a few hundred miles south in Argentina.

Chay Blyth made a comeback in his original boat, now named United Friendly after his sponsor, and crewed by amateurs prepared to pay for a berth.

And Peter Blake, the Kiwi who crewed with British yachtsman Les Williams in the first two races, entered his own 20-metre boat Ceramco New Zealand and filled it with 10 countrymen, selected from 140 applicants, who all had to qualify by completing a three-day assault course as a test of their character and mettle.

Blake's aluminium boat was designed and built for a round-the-world event. His crew were young talented sailors and his ambition knew no bounds. It was no surprise that the bookies ranked Ceramco and Flyer as favourites.

Leg 1 - Portsmouth to Cape Town

Wealthy Italian steel magnate Giorgio Falck started the race at the helm of RollyGo but was taken off at Las Palmas due to a family illness. Reino Enqvist, skipper of Scandinavian, radioed race control to say he was quitting due to rigging, electrical and radio problems onboard.

There was a leak in Flyer's fresh water tank so each crew member was restricted to five small cups of water a day. Blyth lost a rudder and a spinnaker and several boats lost halyards and spinnakers during a half-hour tropical storm.

But worse of all was the lack of wind, which had skippers and crews groaning all the way to the Canary Islands where some trade winds finally kicked in and the spinnakers were dusted. One of the main beneficiaries of these trades was Ceramco, who made good progress through the fleet until the Kiwi yacht dismasted. More precisely, her mast broke in two places, leaving a five-metre trunk and a pile of ropes. Fortunately, the 14-metre top mast section was retained so the crew were able to lash the two together and carry on, albeit at a much reduced speed.

Blake decided on a route to Cape Town that would add 1,500 miles to the journey, but would keep them in following winds. Many thought he was mad, but the detour proved to be one of the race's all-time epic voyages and, despite the handicap, Ceramco made it into Cape Town ahead of nine of the 27 boats that finished the leg.

Ceramco's problems marked the start of a sorry procession of mast episodes. La Barca Laboratorio, the Italian yacht packed with scientists conducting experiments on human behaviour, were able to test their own reactions when their rigging went over the side, forcing them to head for Recife in Brazil to make repairs.

RollyGo was the next casualty. Around 1,600 miles out of Cape Town, the rigging adjuster failed. FCF Challenger split her mast, Norway's Berge Viking broke the fitting at the top of her forestay, US entry Alaska Eagle broke hull frames and European University Belgium damaged her rigging. Save Venice also had problems with her forestay and United Friendly sprung a serious leak.

In all, 21 out of 29 boats reported structural, rigging or equipment failure. Replacement gear was dispatched to various parts of the world and programmes for repair drawn up in Cape Town, though despite the chaos, FCF Challenger's Tim Burrell found time to meet then marry Cape Town secretary Carol Jennings. Five days was all it took.

First across the Cape Town finish was Van Rietschoten in Flyer, having sailed an immaculate leg. He also won on handicap, leaving the rest of the fleet in little doubt over

his intentions and ambitions.

Italian entry Vivanapoli arrived eight days late for the start of leg two after it was boarded by an Angolan gunboat. Officials saw the crew's South African visas and they were all promptly arrested on suspicion of spying. It took the Italian ambassador a week to secure their release.

Leg 2 - Cape Town to Auckland

Amazingly, all the repairs were completed on time and the restart went ahead on the due date. But within a fortnight, the radio was buzzing again with reports of more carnage as 33 Export, Licor 43 and European University Belgium were dismantled and Flyer was forced to ease off the pace after two violent broaches in the Southern Ocean weakened the rigging.

But as the miles were negotiated, so the competition between Ceramco and Flyer began to intensify. Ceramco set the bar high with a 24-hour run of 316 miles on 6 November, a Whitbread record, but they could not shake Flyer. There was no automatic means of logging positions so monitoring progress, when it was totally dependent on skippers volunteering information, proved unreliable. As the two boats locked horns in the Southern Ocean, the skippers started to use these haphazard communications as part of their tactics.

The competitive Van Rietschoten was the worst culprit. Divulge an inch and the competition will grab a mile, was his mantra, one that was reinforced by his watch leader Dalton. So when Van Rietschoten suffered a heart attack and fell unconscious, the emergency was kept secret.

Van Rietschoten said: "Fremantle was 10 days sailing away. If I was to die, the critical period was within the first two to three days so any diversion would have been wasted. The New Zealanders were breathing down our necks. If they had known I had a health problem, they would have pushed their boat even harder. We had to stay ahead and the less they knew about my condition, the better. When you die at sea, you are buried over the side. Perhaps those Ceramco boys might have spotted me drifting by and I was

determined that that would be the only thing they would see or hear from Flyer on that matter!"

On the approach to Auckland, all of New Zealand was hoping it would be their boy wonder - Blake - emerging first out of the mist. It was felt his local knowledge would aid Ceramco's progress and after the disappointment of the first leg, it would be a fitting victory. But as the leading pair headed south into Auckland they encountered strong headwinds which favoured the bigger and heavier Flyer. A small lead was turned into an eight-hour advantage giving the Dutch boat their second win in two legs. Inevitably, Blake was given a rapturous welcome by hundreds of boats and the excitement grew when it was later discovered that Ceramco had won the leg on corrected time.

"Van Rietschoten performed immaculately, as did Blake," Rear Admiral Charles Williams remembers. "It was the competition between them that not only created an enormous amount of interest in the race all around the world, but also transformed it from an amateur event into a serious race. It captured everyone's imagination. In the previous two races, people were taking spinnakers down at night. Can you imagine!"

Leg 3 - Auckland to Mar del Plata

The jousting between the determined Blake and the ambitious team on Flyer continued throughout the third leg back across the Southern Ocean, making the race compulsive viewing for not just race followers, but, for the first time, a growing band of armchair sports fans.

For some of the time, the two boats were in sight of each other and on four occasions they crossed each other's paths. Such was the interest in this thrilling battle, that interviews with skippers were broadcast live, with millions of listeners tuning in to hear Blake's reports in New Zealand. At the London Boat Show in Earls Court, British Telecom established a five-telephone link-up with several yachts, starting with a two-way between Jimmy Saville, the British disc-jockey and Chay Blyth, skipper of United Friendly, who described to the crowds the Southern Ocean scenes around him - mainly icebergs - and what his crew were doing at that precise moment - which, he quipped, involved standing on the bow looking for icebergs.

Flyer and Ceramco were neck-and-neck as they rounded the Horn, with just 30 minutes or five miles separating the two. On standby, as expected, was HMS Endurance, but a more sinister sight was a fleet of Argentinean warships on an espionage mission ahead of the invasion of the Falklands some weeks later.

Les Williams, the skipper of FCF Challenger, later socialised with members of the Argentine Navy during the stopover where, he claims, they spoke about a forthcoming invasion. He shared the information with British authorities to little reaction and the rest is history.

While all this drama was unfolding at the front of the fleet, there were problems further back as the Southern Ocean took its toll on the boats. The start in Auckland had seen six fewer boats than at Portsmouth and a further two were forced to retire due to rudder and rigging crises. Life was particularly hard on United Friendly, who had to return to New Zealand shortly after the start because a vital tool that had been regularly used on the mast track fell overboard.

Some of the drama was the stuff of dreams, as a crewmember on Ceramco discovered after a particularly difficult watch. He had a vivid dream that the mast had cracked at a point not visible to the naked eye and this proved to be divine intervention at work for, sure enough, when the mast collar was later removed the crew discovered a serious crack.

Jostling for the lead kept crews on Flyer and Ceramco fully stretched right to the finish line in Mar del Plata, but it was the heroic Van Rietschoten who completed the 6,175-mile crossing first, taking just 24 days. Remarkably, Blake finished seven hours later. The two skippers had staged an enthralling ding-dong and both were to have a profound influence on the race - transforming it into a Grand Prix event, contested by the world's most dedicated and committed professionals.

Leg 4 - Mar del Plata to Portsmouth

Despite the focus on Flyer and Ceramco, the overall leader of the race by the start of the

final leg to Portsmouth was the French boat Charles Heidsieck III, skippered by Alain Gabbay.

Van Rietschoten needed to cross the Solent finish line a whopping 92 hours ahead of Charles Heidsieck III, which looked unlikely unless the French boat came a cropper during the 5,970-mile passage. But the Dutchman was a tough competitor – his list of boat rules included a strict ban on complaints over food – and soon he was employing tactics to unsettle his opponents.

It became harder to find out where the boats were since he refused to reveal his position in case it conceded any advantage, a tactic duly adopted by other skippers. It was only a week before the end of the leg that the situation became clear. Flyer was 260 miles from the Azores and Charles Heidsieck III was 300 miles astern, three hours ahead on handicap.

Of the original 29 starters, only 24 were still in contention during the final leg and there were to be more casualties. Les Williams in FCF Challenger lost a mast – the 10th dismasting of the race – and Claudio Stampi's boffins on La Barca Laboratorio were forced to pump after their keel bolts started to fall out.

It was at the Azores that the winners and losers were determined and as ever, it was the weather that had a lot to do with it. The two leading boats, Flyer and Ceramco, made it through before the light airs struck and powered off in the direction of the Needles, Flyer arriving without putting in a single tack. But Charles Heidsieck III and Kriter IX had the brakes applied and without much else to do, the crews offloaded any remaining fresh water, beer and surplus food in order to lighten the load.

It was to no avail and when Charles Heidsieck III eventually arrived at the finish line, the crew on Flyer had been there already for almost five days, despite grounding briefly on Shingles Bank. The margin gave the legendary Dutchman a 19-hour advantage and victory in the race for the second consecutive time. A fourth line honours win in four legs meant Van Rietschoten had also fulfilled his aim of being the fastest boat around the course, not just in 1981 but of all time, having carved an almighty 14 days off the race



record.

Blake's Ceramco notched up a second leg win on handicap, to bring his momentous race to a close. Ceramco's dismasting shortly into the first leg had effectively ruled him out of title contention, but the way he kept his crew motivated to complete the circuit at breakneck speed was an inspiration for a whole new generation of Whitbread race skippers.

Race Four: 1985-86

Portsmouth - Cape Town - Auckland - Punta del Este – Portsmouth

Distance: 26,740nm

Winner: L'Esprit d'Equipe



A dramatic change to position reporting procedures created a whole new atmosphere in the fourth event as skippers' abuse of the haphazard system became a thing of the past and each of the 15 entries was fitted with a satellite tracking beacon.

All clever stuff, which more than any other innovation illustrated the way the race was evolving. More technology, more sophistication, more professionalism, more sponsors, bigger budgets and higher safety standards.

For aficionados, there was plenty to ponder as the positions were updated every few hours but, for most, the 1985 race once again boiled down to personalities. If the third race had been about Cornelis van Rietschoten and Peter Blake, the fourth was a more convoluted affair since the seven big maxi yachts were outclassed on handicap by one of the smallest, but best prepared yachts in the fleet, the former 33 Export, now renamed L'Esprit d'Equipe and skippered by young ambitious Frenchman Lionel Pean.

Blake was back for his fourth attempt on the title with a new 24-metre heavyweight called Lion New Zealand. It was immediately tipped as the boat to beat, not just because Blake was so experienced but because his boat was 'state-of-the-art' with a computer-assisted 'navigatorium'. They also had a microwave oven in the galley, though Blake was experimenting with a freeze-dried regime.

On Norsk Data GB, the former GBII, skipper Bob Salmon had recruited a sailing star of the future called Tracy Edwards, one of only five women in a race featuring 250 men. Her job? To feed 15 crew for six weeks. It proved a short-lived arrangement. Her meals were lauded, but she tired of the lack of leadership and teamwork so in Cape Town jumped ship to Atlantic Privateer.

Swiss skipper Pierre Fehlmann had become a familiar face by 1985, having competed in 1977 and 1981. With a background in engineering and computer sales, his expertise was in tapping into corporate budgets to fund new builds, in this case UBS Switzerland.

These 'rock star' skippers were joined by the real thing in the form of Simon Le Bon, the lead singer of Duran Duran. He had formed a syndicate to buy Drum, a maxi that had been commissioned for former GBII skipper Rob James, who had tragically drowned the previous year. Drum arrived a few days before the start in Portsmouth after her keel had fallen off during the Fastnet Race six weeks earlier, leaving the crew trapped below the upturned hull. Such an experience had put some of them off, but against the odds skipper Skip Novak got boat and crew to the Solent start.

Leg 1 - Portsmouth to Cape Town

There was dense fog on the start line and set the tone for a typically challenging leg.

UBS Switzerland and Lion New Zealand got the better of the early light wind exchanges, taking a course further out to sea off Spain while the rest of the fleet sailed towards Cape Finisterre and got caught in gentle breezes.

The pair picked up the northeast trade winds and headed for the Doldrums, UBS holding the lead, but calm airs soon drove the maxi skippers into taking wildly different approaches. By October 22, Drum, Lion, NZL Enterprise, Atlantic Privateer and UBS were stretched across the ocean and suffering similar poor luck in finding breeze.

Onboard Drum, the growing professionalism of the sport was becoming clear to Novak. "The standards of comfort onboard most boats in the 1985-86 race had evolved to a certain degree of Spartan living, with an open plan layout below and not much protection

on deck. Other things had also changed from the previous race. Gone was the booze supply, ditto the freezer full with roasts and other luxuries. Privacy was afforded in partitioned cubicles rather than cabins, but we at least had a head with three walls and a door on it."

On the water, conditions swung from one extreme to the other. Southeasterly gales, created by the more southerly position of the South Atlantic High, turned what should have been a fast reach to Cape Town into a battle against the breeze and a nasty cross sea. The rigid rigging of the maxis and their composite hulls took a beating, with Drum taking a diversion to Namibia because of severe delamination to the hull. Thankfully for Novak, the gale died out and he returned to his original course.

Life was harder on Atlantic Privateer, whose mast came down after days of plunging in big seas. A jury rig was erected and that too came down before the crew gave up and motored to the finish.

UBS Switzerland and Lion crossed the finish line 16 hours apart after 34 days of racing to settle the battle for line honours, while L'Esprit d'Equipe won the leg on corrected time, throwing down a marker for the rest of the race.

"These were the days before shore support crew," Novak said. "Once the crew landed in port, the next day was spent de-rigging, and then a full schedule of repairs and rebuilding was meted out. Rather than the masseuse, we had the toolbox, instead of the shore-side 'psychologist' of today, we were kept on the straight by using a long-board for eight hours fairing the hull. Flying home to the family between legs, as some crews do today, was unheard of. And email? Well, if mom was lucky she got a postcard or two."

Leg 2 - Cape Town to Auckland

The full fleet was fit and raring to go, Eric Tabarly having agreed to concede one day per leg as a penalty for replacing his keel on Cote d'Or, and Novak carrying another ton of weight on Drum as a result of repairs to the hull and rudder.

There were more light airs on the run into the Southern Ocean and, much to the crew's disappointment, not much wind when they got there. They cheered up when the first iceberg was spotted though the onset of thick fog made life tricky and some individuals wondered what they were doing with their lives.

"Everything I wear is wet," wrote Simon Gundry on Lion. "But why complain? Everybody else has the same problem. Leaving my climb up the steps 'till the last possible second

before 4am and the start of my watch. Why do overtime on a shitty night like this, I thought.”

On Cote d'Or, the hairdryer came out, but went nowhere near anyone's head. It was used instead to dry out the telex and weather fax, while on Lion there were other more pressing problems. “Due to renovation of the yellow head, and the red head becoming the dead head, a reallocation of services and schedules is now taking place. One and a half sittings per day (or three every two days), booking required, to take no longer than 7 ½ minutes per sitting. Pees – three at three minutes, no booking required.”

A broach on Cote d'Or left Michel Mouseu over the side, grasping the outside of the lifelines, his grip only loosening once he had hauled himself back over the pushpit.

Philips Innovator, featuring a young Bouwe Bekking as co-skipper, ran into strife when a gybe destroyed her navigation antennae. The problem was thrown into sharp focus when Philips had a near miss with an outlying island off Kerguelen.

Come Christmas Day, the crews were ready to let their hair down. A lobster bisque with royal couscous harissa followed by a chocolate log was served up on Cote d'Or and some crewmembers on Lion hung stockings on the bulkheads. They remained empty though a gift from the weather gods, in the form of some good breezes, propelled them forwards in the fleet to put a festive smile on their faces.

As the fleet rounded Cape Reinga on the run into Auckland, NZI Enterprise and Atlantic Privateer were in front with UBS Switzerland and Lion not far behind, though soon after Lion collided with a whale and was slowed by damage to the rudder.

Atlantic Privateer chose to hug the shore while NZI stayed further out, which gave the American boat a three-mile advantage. Digby Taylor pulled out all the stops to move within half a mile of the leader, but it was Atlantic Privateer who slid across the line first, followed two minutes later by the Kiwis. All fifteen yachts completed the leg which was a race record, but it was Phillips Innovator, the Dutch crew, who posted their first win on handicap, followed closely by L'Esprit d'Equipe.

Leg 3 - Auckland to Punta del Este

Anyone who was in Auckland on February 15, 1986 will still remember the restart as being one of the highlights in New Zealand's rich yachting tradition. More than 6,000 boats sent the fleet on their way and 300,000 spectators joined in the fun on the shore.



Three days later, the mast on NZI came crashing down, putting a dampener on that celebration and an end to Taylor's campaign. The problems of getting a replacement mast from England proved insurmountable.

No such calamities on UBS Switzerland, who roared off towards Cape Horn. Mar del Plata in Argentina had been withdrawn from the course due to the fallout from the Falklands War, and instead the fleet headed for Punta del Este in Uruguay.

The Roaring Forties proved to be not roaring at all, but the Southern Ocean gave them all a test, especially Atlantic Privateer, which did an almighty broach as they surfed at around 20 knots. Even the spreaders disappeared underwater, the crew claimed afterwards, and Tracy Edwards struggled to hold things together in the galley. "The conditions were horrendous and I thought I was going to die. I'd be cooking and puking up into the sink at the same time," she admitted in her autobiography, *Living Every Second*.

Drum too was rampaging through the waters when she suddenly rolled twice and was knocked down on her side for around five minutes, which left the spinnaker shredded and a spinnaker bag wrapped round the propeller. Crewmember and future race legend Magnus Olsson donned his diving gear for a dip in the freezing waters, but he was pulled under the stern of the boat, losing his facemask and mouthpiece. When the crew pulled him in they discovered he was unconscious but thankfully he came around.

Race HQ's radio link was buzzing with reports of damage caused by the strong winds, but these petered out completely as the Horn loomed into view. Unusually, it was surrounded by calm waters. Normally the fleet would have arrived in late January, but the start of the 1985 race had been put back by a month and in March the landmark proved more like a tourist attraction than a sailor's graveyard.

First round was Fehlmann, but this was also the moment, between Cape Horn and Punta del Este, that the race really took off with UBS, Drum, Atlantic Privateer and Cote d'Or all fighting hard to be the first to Uruguay, the light headwinds adding extra spice to the action. In one seven-hour period, the UBS crew completed 14 sail changes in a bid to keep up their speed, and this diligence paid dividends when the Swiss crew were first over the line, nine hours ahead of Drum and nine hours and 20 minutes before Atlantic Privateer. Behind the maxis, L'Esprit d'Equipe took the leg on corrected time from Equity & Law and regained the overall handicap lead by a margin of nearly five hours.

Leg 4 - Punta del Este to Portsmouth

The final leg proved a fascinating two-dimensional affair with the big maxis battling for a win on elapsed time and the rest of the fleet vying for a podium place on corrected time. Blake, lying second on elapsed time, could only win if UBS suffered breakages and Novak on Drum, who had come second in Uruguay, was within 18 hours of Lion. But with fluky winds up the Brazilian coast, the Doldrums and the full might of the North Atlantic ahead, the race remained anything but a foregone conclusion.

On Drum, the precocious Grant Dalton described himself as a 'legend in the making' and the crew enjoyed a hygiene moment when a rain squall offered a chance for a scrub, though Novak's reference to it focussed on 'a whole lot of spotty bums'.

The Azores High once again proved decisive. UBS veered east of the Azores and entered a frontal system which hurried them along, while Drum opted to pick up the southerly winds around the back of the High which slowed them down. With just a few days left, they were becalmed and the gap to the leader stretched to an irretrievable 500 miles, which at the finish line in Portsmouth translated into a 40-hour deficit.

They were even overtaken by Cote d'Or, who sneaked across the line three and a half hours ahead of the frustrated Drum crew and things took a turn for the worse when customs officers, accompanied by sniffer dogs, boarded the English boat just minutes after the finish to see whether the rock star had picked up any illegal substances in Uruguay.

Blake arrived soon after to retain second place overall on elapsed time and the little French boat L'Esprit d'Equipe arrived in eighth place, some four days after UBS, to take the 1985 Whitbread Trophy in front of a huge group of fans who had travelled across the Channel to applaud France's emphatic victory, their first in the event.

Race Five: 1989-90

Southampton - Punta del Este - Fremantle - Auckland - Punta del Este - Fort Lauderdale - Southampton

Distance: 32,018nm

Division A winner: Steinlager 2

Division C winner: Equity & Law II

Division D winner: Esprit de Liberte

Cruising division: Creighton's Naturally



A series of changes were made as organisers finalised the rules of engagement for the 1989-90 Race.

Cape Town was removed from the race track owing to political pressure and instead the 23-boat fleet headed to Punta del Este in Uruguay, which had proved a popular stopover in 1985. Punta featured twice on the new route - as the start and finish of the Southern Ocean legs - and further stopovers in Fremantle, Australia and Fort Lauderdale, USA were also added, extending the race by 5,000 miles to 32,000 miles.

The scrapping of the handicap system and introduction of a prize structure based on four different classes led to a loss of interest among the small boat sector but a proliferation of maxis. Among the yachts was the 1985 winner, renamed *Esprit de Liberte* and skippered by Eric Tabarly's brother Patrick, while Tracy Edwards, the cook on *Atlantic Privateer* in 1985, sold her house to help pay for Pierre Fehlmann's old 18-metre *Disque d'Or III* and put together an all-women crew to compete in the race.

She encountered many problems in landing a sponsor, but an old connection with the King of Jordan provided her with a last-minute deal worth £800,000 from Royal Jordanian Airlines. The project was named *Maiden* and Edwards showed great guile and nerve to raise the campaign's profile, including inviting the Duchess of York to christen the boat. Despite the publicity, many doubted that Edwards' crew would get round, let alone post any decent results. She proved them wrong.

Peter Blake was back for the fifth time, with a new ketch named *Steinlager 2*. His watchleader from the previous race, Grant Dalton, had also raised a campaign, securing funds from Fisher & Paykel for a brand new maxi and hot-shot crew. This added a compelling new dimension to the race since both Blake and Dalton were strongly tipped as likely winners. Stories of their bitter rivalry were legion though few had any foundation since, off the water, the pair were good friends.

British Olympic medallist Lawrie Smith, a crewmember on *Drum* in 1985, was the lucky beneficiary of a bumper budget from cigarette company Rothmans for a maxi campaign, but both the build and Smith's appointment were completed late. Even before the race started, everyone knew Rothmans was slower than her Kiwi counterparts.

Pierre Fehlmann also tapped into the tobacco market, his well-funded *Merit* maxi quickly gaining favour as one of the favourites, while Roger Nilson, who would still be racing this event 20 years later, was starting his third edition, this time in charge of *The Card*.

Leg 1 - Southampton to Punta del Este

Southampton replaced Portsmouth as the start and finish port and around 4,000 boats carrying an estimated 50,000 people gathered in the Solent for the send off, a show that *Steinlager 2* stole when she whizzed out ahead of everyone else to grab a 16-mile lead by nightfall.

Her speeds were awesome and, assisted by helpful winds, Blake's crew soon set a new

record when they covered 343 miles in 24 hours. Fisher & Paykel had also been hurtling along, but six days before the finish they dropped off the pace without explanation. They arrived in Punta del Este without their mizzen - Dalton had refused to divulge this vital information to anyone.

Not surprisingly, Steinlager won the leg in Division A, beating Merit by 12 hours and Fisher & Paykel by 30. The leg duration, anticipated to be 30 days, turned out to be a whole week less. Rothmans arrived fourth with a cracked deck and Smith was distinctly riled by the Kiwis' success, using the press to raise some concerns.

"Smith was quoted in the British press calling us cheats on the basis that no-one has ever seen Blake's boat out of the water," wrote Steinlager 2's Glen Sowry and Mike Quilter in their book, *Big Red*. "We were not sure what he expected to find on our keel. In retrospect, Smith was probably just trying to unsettle us but in reality all he achieved by this accusation was to make us even more determined to beat him."

The Corinthian spirit of the old days had disappeared along with cocktails at dusk. The prevailing culture was now one of professionalism, pressure and cut-throat competition.

The first casualty of that intense pressure was Alexei Grischenko, co-skipper of Russian entry *Fazisi*. He had not enjoyed the first leg and informed the management he would head for home before returning in Fremantle. A few days into the stopover, however, he went missing. His crew became worried when he did not return after 24 hours and the American co-skipper Skip Novak alerted race officials, who tipped off the local police chief. He had committed suicide.

It was a ghastly time for everyone, complicated by a lack of understanding as to what had led to such a tragic end. "We didn't know why he had committed suicide, but we certainly could assume that the pressures brought to bear by the project, by the rushed and often confused construction in Georgia, the panic in England where he spoke not one word of the language, his lengthy absence from his young family, all must have contributed to his illness. In his planned return to Kiev, possibly he saw himself as a failure," wrote Novak in his book *Fazisi, the Joint Venture*.

Leg 2 - Punta del Este to Fremantle

The crews were rocked by another tragedy in Punta when Janne Gustavsson, a crewmember on *The Card*, had a motorbike accident and died.

The atmosphere was not helped by some other antics. Smith was once again

the bad guy after he poached Gordon Maguire and Henri Hiddes from NCB Ireland to bolster his Rothmans crew; the project manager of L'Esprit de Liberte did a runner with £100,000 and the crew's passports; and Frank Esson, the skipper of British Satquote Defender, was sacked. It was all happening, but against the odds and to the delight of everyone, Fazisi joined the fleet for the start of the second leg.

Again all eyes were on the four big maxis at the front as they made their selections over the best route to Western Australia. Merit, Rothmans and Fisher & Paykel took a more southerly route into iceberg territory and picked up some wind, leaving Blake's boat trailing by 100 miles.

On Creighton's Naturally, a violent broach thrust Bart van den Dwey and Tony Phillips, a cousin of Princess Anne's husband Capt Mark Phillips, overboard. It was around 0300, the seas were big, and although both men were wearing life-jackets and equipped with flares and personal radio beacons, the recovery took more than 45 minutes.

Skipper John Chittenden recalled: "The first man, Bart van den Dwey, was recovered and successfully resuscitated. Tony Phillips was recovered and resuscitation continued for three hours without success. Bart's lifejacket was inflated. Tony Phillips' was not. He hit a stanchion as he went overboard and it is thought unlikely that he was conscious once in the water." Tony Phillips was buried at sea.

In all, seven sailors disappeared over the side in the second leg. All but Phillips survived - a sign of the increased professionalism among the crews who were once more tested to the full by the battering they received in the Southern Ocean. Spinnaker poles and booms, arms and legs, breakages were rife and it was only after the Kerguelen Islands that things began to quieten down, though not before Fortuna Extra Lights had created a new 24-hour record of 405 miles. They came to a crashing halt when crewmember Rafael Tibua broke his ankle in two places after being hurled against the mast. It was left to the four big guns Fisher & Paykel, Steinlager 2, Merit and Rothmans to engage in a fierce battle for the second leg into Fremantle.

Blake crossed first, around 90 minutes in front. Then Rothmans and Merit staged a breathtaking match-race for second place, Rothmans taking the spoils by 28 seconds after 27 days of racing. A week later, Edwards' Maiden crossed the line first in Division D, achieving the best result for a British boat in the Whitbread for 12 years.

On reflection, this was considered the toughest leg in any of the five races to date.

Leg 3 - Fremantle to Auckland

After a few unseasonably hot days in Australia, the crews ploughed straight back into turbulent waters. Gale conditions and heavy seas provided them with an uncomfortable Christmas at sea, though a few crews persisted with stockings and champagne. Not so the crew on Steinlager 2, who were so keen to become the first Kiwi boat into Auckland that all seasonal niceties, such as presents and fresh food, had been ditched to save weight.

Beyond the Tasman Sea, the winds calmed down though the competition between the maxis remained as furious as ever. The leaderboard offered up a new scenario with every position report. With 245 miles to the finish, nine miles separated the first three boats. Steinlager 2 led Fisher & Paykel by four miles, with Rothmans third and Merit just 11 miles behind. Further back, Charles Jourdan came a cropper after a collision with a whale, the crash leaving a three-metre hole in the hull. Fortunately it was above the waterline so the French crew got to work on patching it up and carried on. By chance Union Bank of Finland was also hit by a whale.

Grant Dalton turned off his navigation lights after he rounded the North Cape and was given a dressing down over the radio by Blake, brandishing his rule book. Meanwhile Blake ordered all 15 crew on deck then tuned into the local radio channel to get some idea of the conditions around Auckland. This initiative was to prove inspirational since it prompted a change of sail that gave her a smooth passage through a ferocious 40-knot squall. Dalton was still flying his kite and lost time as he reconfigured, allowing his rivals to stretch their lead to a mile. It was all they needed, Steinlager 2 enjoying the rapturous scenes as they crossed the line less than six minutes ahead of Fisher & Paykel to win their third straight leg in Division A.

It was the first time a Kiwi boat had won the leg into Auckland and the celebrations were huge. There were similar scenes when Maiden crossed the line three days later to win her second leg in Division D. Around 14,000 people gathered on the dockside, even though it was 0100. "I didn't think we could win the third leg," she wrote in her autobiography, *Living Every Second*. "Now I started to dream about winning the entire race. We had extended our lead in Division D to almost 18 hours. Steinlager 2, which headed the maxis, had nowhere near this sort of lead."

Leg 4 - Auckland to Punta del Este

Concerns over the congestion in Auckland were realized when The Card's mizzen became entangled with the mast of one of the thousands of spectator boats and

snapped. Skipper Roger Nilson decided to dump it over the side and sail on as a sloop and, amazingly, the plan worked for a while. The new rigging responded so well in the light airs off Cape Colville that she careered into the lead.

Alas, it was not for long. The Kiwi maxis hit their stride before the sunhats had been replaced by balaclavas and quickly took the lead as the Southern Ocean beckoned. Rucanor Sport, Bruno Dubois' Belgian boat, had to give up and return to Auckland after she collided with a whale and damaged her rudder, while below deck on Maiden started to resemble a casualty department. First Mikaela von Kuskull was knocked unconscious by Maiden's boom then Michelle Paret was hurled into the wheel by a massive wave. Claire Russell, the doctor, strapped Paret into a bunk and kept her there for four days.

As Steinlager 2 and Fisher & Paykel rounded Cape Horn just five miles apart, Brad Butterworth, the Steinlager watch captain, revealed to Dalton over the radio that they were carrying an extra crewmember. Sowry and Quilter wrote: "After a period of stunned silence on Fisher & Paykel, Brad told them who our 'extra' was. While in Auckland, Peter was approached by a family of an old Cape Horner, Frederick Thomas Chapman, who had recently passed away. Chapman sailed around the Horn on the barquentine Garthneill in 1924 and his family thought it fitting that we scatter his ashes as we rounded the Horn. Soon enough he came to be known as Dusty Chapman and was considered by all of us to be a member of the crew."

Things became a lot more serious when, a few days later, all the boats heard the dreaded message. It came from a radio operator on Martela, who with a discernible sense of panic relayed the following words, "Mayday. Mayday. Our keel is falling off."

This was followed by a latitude report then silence. In fact, the operator got out of the hatch just moments before Martela capsized, leaving the crew on the upturned hull. Merit and Charles Jourdan pulled off an amazing ocean rescue.

Blake donned his lucky red ski socks in preparation for another battle with Fisher & Paykel and the race to Punta was on, the last 100 miles offering 55 knots of wind to hasten their arrival. Once more it was Steinlager 2 who, for the fourth time in four legs, tipped over the line first in Division A, this time by a mere 21 minutes.

The incapacity of Paret on Maiden cost the all-female crew the overall lead in Division D and by the time they arrived in Punta in third place, L'Esprit de Liberte had posted a 17-hour advantage.

Leg 5 - Punta del Este to Fort Lauderdale

Fort Lauderdale had been added to the course in an attempt by organisers to raise the race's profile in America. The reality for the crews was a series of long, slow and unbearably hot days of sailing in fluky airs, though there were plenty of tales of tomfoolery from the Punta stopover to keep spirits high.

Lawrie Smith's Rothman's took a more easterly course and led for much of the way to the Doldrums, going as much as 100 miles in front at one stage. But his lead evaporated in the blink of an eye when an unusual weather system gave boats to the west of Rothmans a surge of speed, the two Kiwi boats included.

For Smith's navigator, the Englishman Vincent Geake, it came as no surprise that Steinlager 2 held such an edge throughout the race. "Peter Blake and the Kiwis on Steinlager 2 dominated the race, winning every leg," he recalled in *Life at the Extreme*, the official book of the 2005/06 race. "Pierre Fehlmann on Merit predicted this before we had even crossed the Bay of Biscay on the first leg. He called us on the VHF and said, 'Steinlager has just passed me going a knot and a half quicker, and she's coming your way!'

For the rest of the leg, it was a two-man show with Blake making it five Division A leg victories in five with a 34-minute win over Dalton. His reward was a 4ft 6in burger specially prepared by a local restaurant which kept the Steinlager 2 crew busy for the four hours until Smith joined them on the quayside. A navigational error on Maiden saw them fall behind Rucanor and L'Esprit and they achieved a disappointing fourth place in Division D.

During the 30-day stopover talks turned to the future of the event. In a conference for competitors, designers, yachting officials, sponsors and journalists discussions started on the feasibility and desire for a new class of racing yacht. The design concept, which would ultimately become the Whitbread 60 rule, was initially considered controversial as it was sure to lead to a faster ride across the Southern Ocean, increasing the safety risks in the process.

In the name of progress, the sailors argued for speed, continuing a trend that had been evident for some time. As Geake said: "Down below, the boats were getting more spartan to save weight: no partitions and no table. Steinlager ran without a heater. Our efforts to save weight also saw us allowed to carry only the minimum of clothing. For the Southern Ocean this meant the socks you were wearing when you got on and a spare."

Leg 6 - Fort Lauderdale to Southampton

The final leg was only 12 hours old when the first alarm bells were sounded. Herve Jan on Gatorade reported a broken spreader, which forced them into Jacksonville to make repairs. A few hours later, Rothmans were also headed for land, calling on two Lear jets to fly in parts to fix a broken shroud. The delays destroyed any lingering hopes of a last-gasp victory for Smith in his home port.

On the fourth day, Steinlager 2 was also in trouble and, incredibly, it could have cost her the race at the death. A chain plate holding the main mast and mizzen shroud failed, forcing helmsman Brad Butterworth to crash gybe to save the rig. But Blake was determined to continue even though the mast was in danger of coming down and his crew spent all night working on a new fitting that would keep them going at full speed to the finish. And besides, no one knew of their difficulties because he refused to report the breakage knowing that Dalton would push harder.

Maiden also ran into difficulty, colliding with a whale and then being spun 360 degrees by a waterspout, while the top part of Satquote's mast fell off. For good measure, NCB Ireland broke a running backstay and Merit's chances took a knock when a mast fitting failed. The race had started as a demolition derby and was finishing in the same vein after 32,000 miles of constant battering.

Another pattern was repeating itself in the closing stages. Four days from the finish, the crews from the two Kiwi boats could see each other and just before Lands End the match-racing between them started. Off the Lizard they were within three boat lengths of each other, the lead held by Steinlager 2, and once again Blake cancelled the watch system and pulled on his lucky socks.

Sowry and Quilter wrote: "Throughout the last night at sea, we had everyone sitting with their legs over the side to get every ounce of speed. It was working and the F&P boys could make no impact on us. They dropped even further astern and with the tide about to turn in our favour for the last 20 miles, we slowly began to relax in the knowledge that they couldn't catch us."

They didn't. Dalton arrived in Southampton 36 minutes in arrears. Six wins in six legs gave Blake the Division A crown, his first win in five attempts on the race. But this event is just as well remembered for Dalton's crew, which finished within 90 minutes of their rivals on four of six legs.



Blake was awarded an OBE for his sailing endeavours and bowed out of the Whitbread Race to pursue other interests. Tracy Edwards too was recognised with an MBE in the New Year's Honours list for her remarkable achievements in finishing second in Division D. Lawrie Smith's Rothmans was just off the Division A podium in fourth place, while, for all the drama, only two boats, Martela and Rucanor, failed to complete the course. The Whitbread had become the most prestigious offshore yacht race.

Race Six: 1993-94

Southampton - Punta del Este - Fremantle - Auckland - Punta del Este - Fort Lauderdale - Southampton

Distance: 31,975nm

Maxi winner: NZ Endeavour

Whitbread 60 Winner: Yamaha



As if the event needed an extra edge after the thrills of four years earlier, a new class, the Whitbread 60, was introduced, sounding the death knell for the maxis in future races.

The new boat was conceived to keep down costs. They were less expensive to build, maintain and campaign than the maxis. They were also light, strong, agile and fast so professional yachtsmen, whatever their pedigree, were clamouring to get on the track.

Some of the biggest names on the racing circuit were signing up with W60s. Dennis Conner, the four-time America's Cup winner, teamed up with future Cup legend Brad Butterworth on Winston and came up against another AC veteran and Whitbread debutant, Chris Dickson, on Tokio. Lawrie Smith returned in the modified Spanish maxi

Fortuna - albeit briefly - and Matt Humphries broke another record. The Englishman had been the youngest sailor to take part in the race when, as an 18-year-old in the 1989-90 edition, he sailed on *With Integrity*. Now, at 22, he became the youngest skipper in the event's history, leading *Dolphin & Youth*.

New Zealand's Ross Field had taken part in two Whitbread Races ahead of this edition, sailing onboard *NZL Enterprise* in 1985-86 and then the all-conquering Division A winner, *Steinlager 2*, in 1989-90. With that experience behind him, he fronted *Yamaha* for his third lap. An all-woman crew was also on the track, named *US Women's Challenge* and led by Nance Frank. It would be an eventful race on and off the water for the women.

In the maxi corner were another set of heavyweights in Grant Dalton, preparing for his fourth lap and chasing his second win. His yacht, *New Zealand Endeavour*, was established as one of the early favourites in the small maxi fleet. Pierre Fehlmann was also back, skippering *Merit Cup* in his fifth and final attempt on the title, while 62-year-old Eric Tabarly would take the helm of *La Poste* at the end of leg two.

The presence of two classes was far from popular, with the majority of W60 skippers adamant that they were sailing a different race from the maxis. Discussions of this nature dominated the three-year build up to the 1993 Whitbread and then continued throughout. By the end, Dalton, racing a maxi, conceded that future editions should be sailed in one class.

Leg 1 -

Southampton - Punta del Este

Before leaving, it was said that Smith, whose *Fortuna* maxi had been converted from a sloop into a ketch, had grown tired of people ringing his phone and barking like dogs down the line - a rather blunt way of suggesting his boat had flaws. The jokes had some substance. Smith's new rig, which gave him more sail area than anyone else, was the problem. His mizzen went down within the first 24 hours when the first strong puff of wind arrived, and then, two days later, the rest of the rig came crashing down. Smith was forced to retire from the race and limped home, where he found his phone still ringing...but this time, the message put a smile on his face.

Dalton, meanwhile, blasted down to the Doldrums well ahead of everyone else, then sat becalmed and watched as the others caught up. The only boat not on his radar was *Tokio*, which had headed further south to find more wind. It proved an inspired tactical move by Dickson but Dalton was able to find the pace and lanes necessary to hold on,

arriving in Punta just three hours ahead.

Merit Cup was third over the line, some eight hours after New Zealand Endeavour, while Galicia 93 Pescanova was second in the W60 class, finishing 10 hours behind Tokio. Yamaha was hovering in third place after one leg of the W60's race, while the big names on Winston were fourth. The omens for close racing in this new class were strong, with the first four boats finishing the leg within the space of 13 hours.

Not only had the leg shown how close the W60 fleet was, it had also demonstrated in thrilling detail how evenly matched the two classes were. Even with two separate prizes on offer for the classes, the battle between maxis and W60s would go on to provide a compelling sub-plot.

Off the water, life was no less eventful. US Women's Challenge had run out of money and rumours of a mutiny abounded before senior members of the crew left the team. In the shake-up skipper Frank left the campaign and Dawn Riley, a crew member on Maiden in the previous race, was put in charge.

Leg 2 - Punta del Este to Fremantle

The 'phone call to Smith's Lympington home was an offer to take over as skipper on Swedish W60 Intrum Justitia after Roger Nilson sustained an injury. He was on a plane in a flash, desperate to restore his reputation.

Others were not so keen to head out into the Southern Ocean and one crewmember on the maxi Uruguay Natural jumped off the boat and into the sea just minutes before the start. Many wished they had done the same as the very worst of the ocean's demons turned the second leg into a grim and terrifying experience.

First to suffer was US Women's Challenge. The clew of their spinnaker was wrenched out, forcing them into a Chinese gybe which saw the mainsail spilt into two. It took more than two days to repair and the weather, in the form of a violent snowstorm, did not help. They had endured a testing race until this stage, but respite would come at the end of the leg when Heineken became their main sponsor and injected some much-needed funds.

Catastrophes were then narrowly avoided on New Zealand Endeavour and Tokio, who both lost men over the side on the charge east. Bowman Ken Hara was knocked off Tokio and into an enormous sea but was quickly retrieved owing to good seamanship and an EPIRB device, while Craig Watson took a tumble from Endeavour. He was wearing a harness and after a minute of being dragged through freezing waters was hauled

onboard.

Endeavour's tribulations did not end there, though. Dalton was chancing his arm by flying his full-size spinnaker and the mizzen gennaker in 35 knots of wind, looking to extend his 65-mile lead over Intrum Justitia. He was making excellent speed but was abruptly halted when the mizzen mast snapped at the third spreader. Severely underpowered, they carried on and their stop only subsided when they heard a distress signal coming off the Italian W60 Brooksfield, whose crew was bailing out water after their rudder shaft was ripped out in a gale, leaving a large hole in the hull. There was water everywhere, which wiped out their communications system and left the fleet and Race HQ out of touch and worried.

Winston and Intrum stopped racing and headed to the Italians' aid but it was La Poste, the French maxi skippered by Daniel Malle, who reached Brooksfield first, 12 hours after the first SOS. She stood by in case the boat sank and waited for two US Navy ships to come and escort her to port. Everyone carried on, but an almighty fuss kicked off later over the time compensation for her rescuers.

The demolition derby continued elsewhere as Dolphin & Youth broke their rudder - they lashed it back on and continued - while Spanish W60 Galicia and Winston suffered delamination problems.

Smith, meanwhile, headed south towards the icebergs in the hope of picking up winds. Once again it paid dividends. In one day, Intrum set a new 24-hour record, logging over 425 miles, sailing at an average of 17.75 knots, speeds that Smith later said could be bettered in the right conditions.

Ultimately it was Intrum that crossed the Fremantle finish line first, establishing the W60 as a true thoroughbred, capable of standing up to the roughest conditions and, what's more, capable of some truly extraordinary speeds. Tokio finished second, just two hours astern after more than 7,000 miles, while Winston and Yamaha both made it in before Merit Cup led home the maxis. Endeavour was the second maxi home, a disappointing seventh overall.

Leg 3 - Fremantle - Auckland

The race into Auckland always brings out the best in Kiwis yearning to hear their names chanted by local crowds, who flock to the finish regardless of time or weather.

And so it was in this leg as New Zealand Endeavour's Dalton and Tokio's Dickson enjoyed a battle royale for New Zealand honours. The pair already enjoyed differing relationships with the press in their homeland, with Dalton adopted as the nation's favourite and Dickson viewed in more of a love-hate light. This leg would strengthen those positions further.

Conner's Winston was effectively ruled out of contention for leg three line honours when he made a high-risk tactical move south to find more favourable winds. A short-term blast was followed by days of snail pace momentum and Winston lagged well behind by the time Dickson, in his W60, and Dalton, in his maxi, made their dramatic entrance into a packed harbour at 0300.

They were neck and neck, but as they edged their way closer to the line, Dickson stalled. One could hear the gasps of horror as this nail-biting denouement was played out and the look of grim determination on Dalton's face as he overtook and heaved across the line was enough to prompt a surly, ungracious comment from his opponent in a television interview. He later apologised, but the drama became the talk of the town for days. The margin between them at the finish was a shade more than two minutes.

From that point, it was Dalton who held all the cards, not just in the race but in the nation's affections.

Further back, there was another mad scramble for finishing positions. Winston arrived two and a half hours after Tokio for second place in the W60 class and Yamaha was a further 10 minutes back. The maxi La Poste, now led by Eric Tabarly, finished 24 minutes later, edging Galicia, the fourth-placed W60, by just 12 seconds. When Intrum took fifth in the W60 class, it meant the first seven boats had finished within five hours.

Despite the thrillingly close finishes, Dalton was looking comfortable in the maxi class and Dickson's Tokio was nearly 18 hours ahead in the W60 battle, prompting the yachting correspondent of one major London newspaper to write at the time: "Dickson is a country mile in front. He has only to nurse his boat carefully to win that class." Yacht racing is far from predictable and that would be proved in galling style down the track.

Leg 4 - Auckland - Punta del Este

Cape Horn can inspire prosaic sailors to poetry, but on this occasion the logs barely mention it since, uncharacteristically, the landmark was a picture of calm and tranquillity, creating disappointment among the apprentices and surprise among the seasoned.

In fact, the entire leg was a series of surprises. There were no sleigh rides in the Southern Ocean and Dalton covered 2,500 miles in pouring rain without once being able to hoist his spinnaker.

But there was enough wind in the first few days for the W60s to work up some top speeds, leaving the maxis churning in their wake. Yamaha broke Intrum's 24-hour record by logging 427 miles, but then Intrum came back with a 428-miler to recapture it.

Once again it was Smith, racing with a broken foot on Intrum, who was blazing the trail, though he caused a stir when, on the approach to the Horn and leading both fleets, he shot north far earlier than expected. He sailed into the Horn on a fast reach, while, closer on the wind, Tokio and Galicia slowed up.

Intrum's lead stretched to almost 100 miles over Tokio and half that over New Zealand Endeavour, but the mood dived when the wind dropped and Smith's boat stayed in the same place for hours. Smith's mood wasn't helped when New Zealand Endeavour overtook him, its huge sails casting wind shadows over his path and slowing his progress further. At the finish line, the margin was just five minutes - and to Smith's great frustration, it was in Dalton's favour.

This time it was Smith who put the boot in at the end of the leg, claiming that Dalton and his maxi were roughing up the playing field. "They're supposed to be faster, but they're not," said Smith, who by then was convinced the race's future lay in W60s, rather than maxis. "All Dalton is doing is getting in the way. He was covering my wind all the way in."

Dalton wasn't bothered in the slightest. The win ensured he was top of his class and the quickest boat overall - something that was more than just a footnote to the Kiwi.

"We are enjoying two races and still want to be the fastest boat around the world," said Dalton. "That brings a pressure of its own. I remember thinking that Peter Blake was spreading it a bit thick when he said that it took him three months after the last race to wind down and sleep easy. After all, he was always in front. Now I understand. When you are the one that everyone wants to topple, you cannot relax."

Leg 5 - Punta del Este to Fort Lauderdale Days of savage headwinds turned the Atlantic shores, north and south, into a giant boat repair yard as leg five gave the leaderboard a huge shake-up.

Dolphin & Youth headed for Rio when the bow on the leeward side of the boat began to flex dangerously through delamination, but Dalton decided to make repairs at sea when the same thing happened on New Zealand Endeavour. The bunks were dismantled and used to brace the delaminated portion of the bow. The crew on La Poste were similarly resourceful when their bow started to delaminate and they too carried on.

It was the usual war of attrition for all involved but by far the cruellest shot was absorbed by Tokio late into their sixth day at sea. Chris Dickson was down below when the mast fell but he knew immediately that his hopes of winning the Whitbread had just gone over the side.

“When the rig fell over the side, it didn't make a lot of noise,” Dickson said at the time. “I was down below and the cries of 'oh no, no,' suggested the worst. It is devastating to know all the months of hard work can be lost in a moment.”

His team had been formidable until then, winning the W60's leg one race to Punta del Este and then repeating the feat into Auckland. Added to their second-placed W60 finishes in legs two and four, Tokio took a 14-hour lead over Intrum into this leg. Now, their charge appeared to be over.

Not one to dwell on misfortune, Dickson called the crew to collect the pieces and jury-rig a sail, then headed for the nearby port of Santos, Brazil. They showed remarkable fortitude in constructing a new mast from the wreckage in 36 hours and returning once more to the race track, but their hopes of winning the race were gone.

It left the way clear for Intrum and Yamaha to steal a march. Ross Field had recruited a meteorologist for this leg to act as a full-on wind-seeker and this attention to detail paid dividends as Yamaha stayed in decent breezes while Intrum stopped dead in the Doldrums.

Yamaha crossed the finish line in Fort Lauderdale first, seizing the class lead from Tokio, who would arrive in Fort Lauderdale nine days behind Field's crew. In the maxi class, Merit Cup claimed their second leg win, capitalising on Dalton's delamination misfortune as New Zealand Endeavour finished second, some 45 minutes behind. Intrum was fourth over the line to take second place on the leg in the W60 class, while Galicia strengthened their claims for a W60 podium place by taking third.

Leg 6 - Fort Lauderdale to Southampton

For the aficionados, this final leg proved the most compelling as the navigators came to the fore. Which ones would plot a safe course up the east coast of the US, flying along with the Gulf Stream current, and who would risk the easterly option in search of stronger and steady winds?

Merit Cup and Brookfield took the gamble and flew off at a cracking pace while everyone else played it safe until the time came for them to move out, a manoeuvre that was greeted by a full-blown gale. The spinnakers went up and their speeds doubled to around 25 knots.

Gales were followed by thick fog and some desperately close encounters as Dolphin & Youth bounced between obstacles, first missing a cargo container ship by around 15 metres and then a massive iceberg by a boat length.

The fog lifted and the gales returned which, for Heineken, was almost the last straw as they watched their third rudder break off and float away. A replacement rudder was brought out to her and she carried on.

In Southampton a massive flotilla was awaiting the front-runners and hoping to see local skipper Lawrie Smith make a triumphant return. It wasn't to be. Dickson's Tokio was in blistering form, covering 120 miles in the last six hours to cross the line first in both fleets but he still failed to make it on to the W60 podium owing to his fifth-leg calamity. It was one of the cruellest outcomes in the history of the race.

Winston finished second and Field's Yamaha third, good enough to win the W60 class by 15 hours from Intrum on overall time. Smith's Intrum was the fourth W60 to cross the Southampton finish line.

Dalton's New Zealand Endeavour was the first maxi over the line for the fourth time - cementing a convincing overall class win in the process - and he also achieved his aim of having the fastest elapsed time across both classes (his time was roughly 10 hours faster than Yamaha's but it is intriguing to wonder who would have clocked the fastest time overall if Tokio had stayed out of trouble).

The end of the 1993-94 race marked the end of maxi racing in the Whitbread, but over the next four years Dalton became almost evangelical in his conversion to W60s, describing maxis by comparison as 'slave ships'.

Race Seven: 1997-98

Southampton - Cape Town - Fremantle - Sydney - Auckland - São Sebastião -
Fort Lauderdale - Baltimore - La Rochelle - Southampton

Distance: 31,600nm

Winner: EF Language



More than half the skippers who entered the 1997-98 race had never previously competed in the Whitbread which may sound like a throwback to the early Corinthian days, but was in fact a reflection of how badly the top professionals of the day wanted the title on their CV.

Among them was a Californian called Paul Cayard, who was famous in America's Cup circles, but unproven offshore. So no-one rated him very seriously as skipper of EF Language but he was to have a profound influence on the evolution of race, raising professional standards to levels previously unseen.



There were a number of changes to the event, which all 10 syndicates were able to use as a platform to secure contracts, sponsorship funds and media coverage. These included a change of name. The Whitbread Round the World Race became the Whitbread Round the World Race for the Volvo Trophy after the Swedish automotive giant provided additional support.

There was also a change to the scoring method, with elapsed time replaced by points acquired at each finish based on position. Meanwhile, the number of stopover ports increased from seven to nine to increase both public awareness of the event and the media coverage, which like most events was key to its success. The additions of São Sebastião, Brazil; Baltimore/Annapolis in the United States; and La Rochelle, France provided the race with new markets.

There was another dramatic development which enabled round-the-clock tracking by race followers. Positions, news items, emails from the boats and stacks of background information were all posted on a website, guaranteeing a massive new audience who could live the race as it happened for the first time.

Lawrie Smith was back with a well-funded campaign backed by Silk Cut after initially skippering EF Language ahead of the start. Smith would be up against some other old foes including the hugely competitive Kiwi duo, Chris Dickson on Toshiba and Grant Dalton on Merit Cup.

Gunnar Krantz, skipper of Swedish Match, and Knut Frostad, skipper of Innovation Kvaerner, had both been with Smith on Intrum Justitia in the previous race while the other five skippers had no experience of the race, including Christine Guillou, the French skipper of EF Education, the all-woman sister ship to Cayard's EF Language.

Leg 1 - Southampton to Cape Town1

Despite the lively start and some amazing speeds in the first few hours, the weather gods decided to take a snooze for most of the month, stirring just occasionally to deliver a violent squall or fluky gust.

A leg that was supposed to take 30 days ended up, in some cases, taking a lot longer, leaving many crews short on rations. Anxious to save weight and maximise speed potential, the skippers had allowed only bare essentials onboard, but this fixation was starting to look a little misguided as the pounds started to drop off the sailors. Cayard later reported that some members of his crew lost up to 10 per cent of their body weight.

Halfway down, fresh winds having filled in after the Doldrums, it was Frostad's Innovation Kvaerner who was up front with EF Language second and closing, and Dalton's Merit Cup third, but it wasn't long before Cayard took off.

The business of keeping a constant 15 knots on the speedometer had the articulate Cayard firing off an email describing the experience as "a cross between really scary and really fun". It marked the start of a new era in communication as the gifted EF Language skipper recorded every emotion throughout 32,000 miles of racing. The rawness of his expression struck a chord among growing legions of armchair followers.

By day 28, Cayard had taken the lead and extended the advantage over Merit Cup to 113 miles. The other skippers were fast realising what an opponent Cayard was shaping up to be.

"No-one has slept for 24 hours," Dalton reported. "We've been on deck for all that time. At least it has temporarily stopped them moaning about food! But Cayard is sailing well and he will be difficult to catch."

For Smith, it must have been hard to watch the success of the boat he left. It had initially been reported that he quit EF Language when interest came in from Silk Cut, presenting him with the chance as an English skipper to front an English campaign. Eight years later, Magnus Olsson, a co-ordinator of the EF campaign and one of the team's sailors, revealed a few secrets about that switch. "We sold him for a lot of money," he said. "I think this was the first time anyone has ever sold a sailor as we did – just like you sell a football player. We had a contract and Silk Cut wanted him and he was keen to go. Because we didn't announce that we'd sold him, people just assumed he quit."

When it came to finding a replacement, Olsson and his colleagues were bowled over by Cayard's personality. "Paul said two very important things to us: he hated to lose and then he said to me, 'Magnus, remember one thing: I never get beaten by Laurie Smith'. That really made us laugh."

Cayard proved impossible to catch in that opening leg and EF Language crossed the finish line in Cape Town first, some 20 hours ahead of Merit Cup with Innovation Kvaerner coming in third two hours later.

Leg 2 - Cape Town to Fremantle

The shock of Cayard's first leg win was soon overtaken by the announcements that rocked the race fraternity during the Cape Town stopover. Toshiba dropped the first

bombshell, revealing that co-skipper Chris Dickson had resigned. The rumours concerning his relations with the crew and syndicate head Dennis Conner were rife, but Dickson claimed the decision was "a personal one". Paul Standbridge, a respected member of the crew, was appointed skipper for the next leg, but there was uncertainty as to whether this was a permanent appointment.

Then it was announced that America's Challenge was withdrawing due to a lack of funds, leaving skipper Ross Field, the two-time winner, without a ride.

As usual, most skippers hugged the shore on the way out of Cape Town, except Swedish Match's Gunnar Krantz, who stunned everyone when he veered off sharply and headed west. It was only later that the decision was explained, but it was to be one of the all-time great tactical coups. Co-skipper Erle Williams had spotted a freighter far offshore and could see smoke curving steeply away from the stack. He consulted with Krantz, who immediately swung the nose round and headed in the same direction. They found the wind and made big advances on the fleet, which was crawling along at less than one knot, and by the fifth day the lead had been extended to a whopping 205 miles over second-placed Innovation Kvaerner.

As soon as they hit the Roaring Forties, the picture changed dramatically and both front-runners took off. "Yes, we are in the Roaring Forties," reported Knut Frostad, who would later become CEO of the event. "It is windy, wet, cold and wet, wet, wet, wet. And we love it."

Swedish Match reported a 24-hour run of 420.6 miles, just 14 miles shy of the monohull record set by Toshiba in July, and after a week they had a 300-mile lead. The lead was almost 200 miles when they crossed the Fremantle finish line, having achieved the highest average speed sailed on any leg in the race's 25-year history at 13 knots.

The boats had taken a battering in the Southern Ocean, but there were no casualties, except for the pride of Cayard, who came in fifth and was repeatedly told by members of his campaign not to push boat and crew so hard. Life was harder on Hans Bouscholte on Dutch entry BrunelSunergy, which for the second time in two legs came last. The skipper was replaced by Roy Heiner. Chessie Racing co-skipper Mark Fischer stood down and was replaced by George Collins, an amateur yachtsman who had pretty much funded the campaign, while on Silk Cut, Smith said there would be no changes despite their disappointing fourth place, and he found consolation in setting a new 24-hour world monohull speed record of 449.1 miles.

Fremantle to Sydney³

The 2,250-mile sprint around the south coast of Australia proved a bit of a slog as the fleet was forced to tack upwind, something the boats were not designed to do with any

finesse. On the second day, the crew on Innovation Kvaerner, the overall points' leader in the race, called for assistance when they discovered a few structural problems in the lower part of the mast just above the step. It compromised their speed and safety so they headed towards the shore and dropped anchor, while a helicopter lowered a repair kit. A few hours later they were up and running again and back in the race with few time penalties. In fact, they were just nine miles astern of leader EF Language.

The headwinds continued, giving each crew a deeply unpleasant ride. EF Language fell back into sixth while Toshiba, with Paul Standbridge still in charge, moved into the lead. The discomfort was compounded on Silk Cut, who reported chronic watermaker problems, requiring immediate repair. While the engineers set to work, they relied on hand-operated watermakers. Two men had to pump for six hours to produce enough water to cook a single dehydrated meal.

Bizarrely, the same mast problems on Innovation Kvaerner appeared on Swedish Match, but Krantz was further offshore than the Norwegians so heading inshore to drop anchor and make repairs was not an option. They continued with a conservative sail plan, knowing the mast could come down at any time. To lessen the risk, Krantz went south to find favourable winds and, remarkably, a few miles out from Sydney, Swedish Match went into the lead.

Cayard responded by putting up every available sail. His sheer doggedness and uncanny skill in eking out speed powered him to the front, but only just.

The fleet was bunched up as it entered Sydney Harbour in darkness and while the battle between Cayard and Krantz proved compelling, the award for performance in the face of adversity went to the crew of Innovation Kvaerner, who were lying in fifth place despite a near disaster onboard when bowman, Alby Pratt, was tossed overboard during an early morning sail change. Frostad put in a U-turn in a bid to retrieve him, which he did when a crewman caught sight of his strobe light.

Six of the competitors arrived within 11 minutes, Cayard putting five minutes and eight seconds between him and second-placed Krantz after 2,250 miles of racing. Less than a minute later, Chessie Racing also crossed the line and Dalton's Merit Cup was 16 seconds behind. Cayard summed it up: "It was the tightest ocean race I have ever been in. Everything balanced out perfectly and we had one hell of a boat race."

Leg 4 - Sydney to Auckland

It may have been Christmas, but there was little time to relax as crews got their boats shipshape for the sprint to Auckland. The mast problems on Innovation Kvaerner and Swedish Match proved preoccupying and although they were made safe for the Tasman crossing, Krantz made plans to have a new mast flown to Auckland as he didn't wish to round Cape Horn on the fifth leg with vulnerable equipment.

Toshiba syndicate chairman Dennis Conner showed up in Sydney to take over from Standbridge, a move to see for himself why Toshiba were lagging behind. His eagerness got the better of him on race day and he crossed the start line three seconds before the gun. This error could have proved costly, but after 24 hours Conner was among the top three, his sights fixed on a podium place. When he joined Krantz in the route south - Cayard opted to go north - their advantage over the rest of the fleet grew, though as they approached Cape Reinga it was Swedish Match who held a six-mile lead. Cayard was second to last, ruing his tactical error.

Krantz thought he had it in the bag, but within hours of rounding the Cape, Swedish Match slipped into a windless hole and stopped dead. It was one of their worst moments in the race, said co-skipper Erle Williams. "It's a yachtsman's worst nightmare...when you are leading, to fall into a hole and to know that the others are coming at you."

By the time they moved off, Merit Cup, crewed largely by Kiwis, had stolen a march, driven on by the reception they knew awaited them. Dalton pulled into the lead, but Conner, who was right on his stern, threatened to cause a major upset at the last minute. The two of them scrapped for honours in front of a crowd of thousands, most of them Kiwis desperate to see Conner put in his place.

The last couple of miles were sailed in 45 knots of wind to make the closing moments some of the most breathtaking of any seen in the event. Dalton ripped through the convoy of spectator boats at breakneck speed and charged across the line first and Conner heaved over two minutes later. Dalton was overcome with emotion. "I was telling my crew on the way in of the two greatest days in life," he said. "The first was four years ago when we beat Tokio into here, and the second was today."

Cayard came fourth, but earned enough points to retain the overall lead. Furthermore, his crew reported a human side to their fiercely driven leader. On Silk Cut, tales of crew conflict were rampant and Smith did his best to quash the rumours by declaring on his arrival in sixth place that there would be no crew changes. He then replaced Steve Hayles, the navigator, and watch captain Neil Graham with Vincent Geake and Gerard Mitchell. Conner, meanwhile, put Standbridge back in charge of Toshiba.

Leg 5 - Auckland to São Sebastião

It was back into the Southern Ocean and everyone was prepared for a battering though it came sooner than anticipated. The all-women crew on EF Education, who had had their fair share of bad luck already, had to take emergency action to avoid a catastrophic dismasting, while leader EF Language passed a huge iceberg just off their lee side. The ice was scary enough in itself, but combined with the turbulent seas, many of the crew were left rooted to the spot. Mark Rudiger was stuck in his navigation station, fearful that if he ventured three metres forward to fetch a cup of coffee, the weight in the boat might be displaced and the bow would nose dive catastrophically into the approaching waves.

Smith's Silk Cut, in dire need of a good result, then fell foul of more misfortune. While running in 30 knots, the crew heard a loud bang and a section of mast above the second set of spreaders fell. They erected a jury-rig and decided to head for Ushuaia. The mast on EF Education followed suit a couple of days later having been unable to withstand the loads imposed by 35 knots of wind. Both would ultimately retire from the leg.

Meanwhile, Cayard was having a fabulous time, enjoying the best of the conditions to grab a 350-mile lead. When the breezes were favourable, he was right in the middle of them. By the time they died, he had long since moved on and the mood on Swedish Match, Toshiba, Innovation Kvaerner and Merit Cup grew increasingly tetchy as navigators tried to find a way of getting their speeds above four knots.

Roy Heiner on BrunelSunergy found a solution. While the gang of four headed west round the Falklands, navigator Stuart Quarrie suggested a detour, and they headed east. Leaving the islands to port was not the done thing since the winds and weather on the eastern side were notoriously hard to fathom, so it was a massive gamble. BrunelSunergy leap-frogged four boats and moved into second.

Dee Smith on Chessie Racing took the same tactic and moved into fourth, just behind Innovation Kvaerner, but none of them could catch EF Language, who by now was rampaging towards the finish some 500 miles ahead.

Cayard was grinning when he appeared in Sao Sebastiao and conceded his success was down to the lessons he learned during his first, bungled foray into the Southern Ocean. Rudiger agreed. "This time he listened to the guys who had been there before."

Shockingly, Toshiba were stripped of their points for fifth. They had been protested by the race committee, who discovered the engine had been used, but there was no record of it in the log. Standbridge claimed they had switched it on to get the boat into reverse so they could remove some kelp from the keel and rudder. As to why they didn't follow the

strict rules governing such an eventuality remained a mystery and Toshiba was duly disqualified.

Leg 6 - São Sebastião to Fort Lauderdale

Sailing up the east coast of South America to Florida is a bigger nightmare for many racers than rounding Cape Horn, not because the waves are big and the weather horrendous, but because there are no waves and not a lot in the way of weather. This fifth leg, after an initial blast, proved no exception as temperatures soared, the seas grew still and the sails flapped indeterminately.

Down below, reported Knut Frostad, it was a stifling 50 degrees and bunks were soaked. "How nice it is to jump into a bunk that is already soaking wet from the sweat of the guy who slept there before you!"

Silk Cut's Vincent Geake opted to stay near the shore – two miles from the beach at one point – and briefly they led, but soon after crossing the equator the spectre of EF Language loomed over the horizon with Innovation Kvaerner on cloud watch in third.

"Every hour is spent watching the clouds," wrote Frostad. "Will it rain? Where is it moving? How fast? Can we pass ahead or do we have to hike up behind? You just have to make sure you don't end up right in the middle! Some of the clouds are just too big, and you can't avoid them."

True to his word, Cayard overtook Smith on Silk Cut, but the margins were negligible and Smith knew there was everything to gain from keeping up the pressure. Sure enough, he forced an error as Cayard stayed too close inshore and had to rethink his sail plan when he was headbutted by the wind. Smith, meanwhile, was flying his big masthead kite and a tiny advantage turned into a 15-mile lead.

"Frustrating," Cayard hissed. "Watching a 20-mile lead turn into a 15-mile deficit is not fun."

By this point he had mellowed slightly in his approach. Olsson recalled an earlier incident involving his skipper. "Paul got really upset one day when he woke up and saw three pairs of sunglasses hanging on a string on the leeward bunk. For him, absolutely everything had to be on the windward side. He started growling at everyone, saying, 'You have to be more professional'. We got him back. The next time he woke up he saw every pair of sunglasses on the leeward side. All we heard was a loud shout of 'Aaaaagggghh!'. He got the message about his behaviour."

Smith led the fleet into Fort Lauderdale one hour ahead of Cayard, while Krantz and Dalton cantered in behind. Everyone was pleased for Smith. He had sailed a brilliant leg and deserved his first victory of the race, especially after the mast traumas in the previous leg. Cayard had the overall lead and the pack felt he was uncatchable.

Leg 7 - Fort Lauderdale to Baltimore

There were more changes on Toshiba as Conner once again displaced Standbridge for the 870-mile dash north to Baltimore.

Otherwise, the crews concentrated on what lay ahead though only one, George Collins on Chessie Racing, had any real idea of what Chesapeake Bay would throw at them since this was his back yard and he knew how crab pots and tides could slow progress.

In fact, this local knowledge offered little advantage. As the fleet approached Baltimore, Collins was back in seventh place, but he still commanded the lion's share of attention since he was engaged in a supreme battle with his main American adversary, Conner, who, to everyone's great shock, was bringing up the rear.

Taking the advice of his tactician Stuart Quarrie, BrunelSunergy skipper Roy Heiner headed east as soon as they left the sunshine state and they found more breeze and flat seas while the rest of the fleet was blasted by strong headwinds nearer the coast.

For a while, the decision looked like being a winning one as their lead extended to 40 miles, but as they approached Baltimore the others started to catch up and it was the other American, Cayard, who cranked up the pressure in closing the gap.

Heiner held him off for as long as possible and crossed the finish line with a 21-minute advantage over Swedish Match, who had beaten Cayard by 30 seconds.

As soon as the leaders were in, the TV crews headed back out on the water to watch the climax of the Collins versus Conner head-banger. They were neck and neck in seventh place, but despite the loudest cheers ringing out for Chessie Racing, it was Conner who squeezed over the line first. He made it by just 10 seconds.

He might not have tried so hard had he known that the next five hours would be spent in the protest room after EF Education skipper Christine Guillou claimed that Conner had sailed 'recklessly' on the first night out of Fort Lauderdale, resulting in a port-starboard incident that happened after dark. Conner countered, saying that as soon as he was

made aware of Guillou's protest that night he had performed a 720-degree penalty turn in accordance with the rules, which in theory exonerated him. But the jury were not convinced since there was no way of knowing whether Toshiba had actually made the penalty turn so they upheld Guillou's protest and Toshiba were relegated to last in the leg, having been penalised two places.

The gnashing of teeth did not stop there for Conner. A few hours later, he was stunned when his navigator Andrew Cape resigned. It came like a bolt out of the blue, but Cape was clearly disenchanted by the Toshiba experience. It had been "a very hard race and I have not especially enjoyed it", was his only comment.

Annapolis to La Rochelle⁸

The fleet made a short trip to Annapolis for the start of leg eight and as they did the calculators came out to see what was possible on the leaderboard.

By now, Cayard had a comfortable lead of more than 100 points over everyone else but it wasn't enough to guarantee victory. If Swedish Match came into La Rochelle first, and EF Language broke down and was at the back of the fleet, Swedish Match could still wangle it. Krantz, meanwhile, was prepared to take a few calculated fliers. "We have a slim chance," he said. "It's a game of putting the throttle all the way down, but not taking too many risks."

Collins gave up the ghost on Chessie Racing and handed over to another American, John Kostecki, who was to receive his first taste of round-the-world racing. The Kiwi Murray Ross stepped into Cape's shoes on Toshiba and Standbridge was back as skipper.

It was Standbridge who made all the running out of Baltimore, but his early gains were eclipsed by the inevitable tussle that was set to characterise the leg, between Cayard and Krantz. EF Language made a poor start and fell some way behind, which had Cayard in a rage, making sure his crew worked around the clock to catch up. The gap was reduced to 1.3 miles before the tacticians started to execute their Atlantic plans.

Krantz headed north, followed by a reluctant Cayard, who wanted to go south but was terrified of letting Swedish Match out of his sights. Toshiba held the middle ground and promptly moved into second place and then, on day nine, went into the lead though only because a dead seal was caught on the keel strut of Dalton's Merit Cup to slow her down. Before long, the seal was extricated and, despite a subsequent collision with a whale, she got back up to speed and overtook Toshiba.

As the fleet approached France, the leaderboard changed again, but this time it was Lawrie Smith on Silk Cut who was competing with Standbridge. For British race followers, this was irresistible. After almost 13 days at sea, Standbridge crossed the line in La Rochelle to claim Toshiba's first leg victory of the race. Ten minutes later, Silk Cut finished, taking second place.

Behind them, Cayard stuck to his guns of shadowing Swedish Match and crossed the line in sixth, three hours in front of Krantz. It had not been pretty in its execution, but Cayard's plan had finally landed him the 1997-98 Whitbread Round the World Race for the Volvo Trophy, with one leg still to race.

Leg 9 - La Rochelle to Southampton

The last 450 miles came down to filling the two remaining positions on the podium and the contenders included Smith, whose second place into La Rochelle had moved him into fifth place overall with a chance, albeit a slim one, of finishing third.

There was little respect shown to boats or crew in this final thrust, no need to keep anything in reserve for future legs. "We are going to use every little piece of energy we can drag out of our bodies. There is just going to be nothing left in Southampton," warned Innovation Kvaerner skipper Knut Frostad.

After a few hours, less than one mile separated the four leading boats: Merit Cup, EF Language, Silk Cut and BrunelSunergy. With 60 miles left to the finish, and after a 25-mile detour imposed by the organisers to time the climax of the race so that it was watched by the biggest possible audience, it was Dalton and Cayard who were up front, maintaining their rivalry to the end, while behind them Smith and Frostad were vying for third place.

The last few miles were incredibly tense. With strong tides and light airs, none of which were favourable, the going was slow and Dalton's lead was a miniscule one-tenth of a mile over EF Language. It was enough to claim a slender win.

Frostad claimed third, pipping Silk Cut and Smith by 10 minutes and allowing themselves to take fourth on the leaderboard. For Swedish Match, their final leg position of fifth, allied with Merit Cup's win, dropped them from second to third. Chessie Racing, meanwhile, blew their shot at an overall podium position by finishing eighth.



After nine months of high tension the skippers carried their rivalries into the final press conference, but soon all ideas of lodging protests fell by the wayside and the congratulations were duly offered.

For Cayard, the moment was one to savour. "It's a special moment for sure," he said. "Going around the world on a sailboat, when your whole life has been sailing, is a big deal. And then to win the race was extra special, and I am sure it has not all sunk in yet. It takes a certain amount of luck to do what we did on EF Language."

But luck played only a small part. What earned Cayard his remarkable win was an attention to detail that most opponents found at best boring, at worse nauseating. It was a superbly professional effort and few could deny that he thoroughly deserved the title.

Race Eight: 2001-02

Southampton - Cape Town - Sydney - (Hobart pit-stop) - Auckland - Rio de Janeiro - Miami - Baltimore - La Rochelle - Gothenburg - Kiel

Distance: 32,700 nm

Winner: illbruck



During the period between races, Volvo negotiated with Whitbread to take over the ownership and management of the whole event. Volvo had been looking at sailing with a view to sponsoring a major event and The Whitbread fitted the bill perfectly. The new era began in 1998 and with it the event moved to an even higher plane.

Paul Cayard had shifted the goalposts in 1997-98 with his professionalism and in 2001 the race moved forward yet again with eight syndicates taking a Formula 1 approach to running their campaigns with the commercial and technical professionals, plus of course the drivers, commanding the highest salaries.

The days of cocktails at dusk and bacon for breakfast were definitely over. There was not even much evidence of what the crews, all hardened professionals, were feeling as they swept through waters that in the old days had seemed terrifying. The focus had shifted resolutely to tactics, weather and, ultimately, to winning.

A new points-scoring system, allocating equal points for each leg irrespective of length, was designed to scrap the advantage traditionally offered to the first leg winner, who generally had gone on to win the race. The new regime required the crews to keep the pedal to the metal 24/7.

Lawrie Smith bowed out, as did Paul Cayard, whose attentions returned to the America's Cup. A few other high profile names had also signed up for America's Cup challenges, including Britain's Paul Standbridge and Neal McDonald, who alongside Jez Fanstone was one of the few Silk Cut crew from 1997 to emerge with any credit. As the start of the race grew closer, McDonald abandoned Britain's America's Cup syndicate and took up an offer from ASSA ABLOY. His reasons were varied, but the fact that his wife, Lisa, had been appointed as skipper on the all-woman boat Amer Sports Too proved a big draw. Never before had a husband and wife lined up as opponents on the Whitbread/Volvo race start.

Some familiar names were back in the frame. Grant Dalton took the helm of Amer Sports One, while Roy Heiner headed up ASSA ABLOY. Knut Frostad led Djuiice Dragons, Gunnar Krantz skippered Team SEB and John Kostecki, who had played a part in Chessie Racing's efforts in 1997-98, was appointed skipper of illbruck Challenge. illbruck instantly became one of the favourites. News Corp hired Ross Field to lead their syndicate and Fanstone was named as skipper.

Sao Sebastiao, the South American stopover, was replaced by Rio de Janeiro and Fort Lauderdale was substituted with Miami. Reflecting the Scandinavian interests of Volvo, Gothenburg and Kiel made their debut on the race track.

Leg 1 - Southampton to Cape Town

Lisa McDonald's crew on Amer Sports Too had only been together for a week when they crossed the Solent start line and their lack of preparation became evident within minutes as their spinnaker disintegrated before they had passed the Needles.

The opening leg delivered the mother of all baptisms for the first-timers as the Bay of Biscay kicked up an almighty storm, ripping Djuiice's mainsail before the winds subsided almost completely to give them a quiet ride to the Doldrums.

The development of the Volvo Ocean 60 (originally the Whitbread 60) was geared to creating close contests and the first leg highlighted how evenly matched the boats were as the top five boats drag-raced most of the 7,350 miles to Cape Town.

Dalton's Amer Sports One led for much of the leg, but in the last few miles calamity struck as Dalton reported two successive crew errors that led to the demolition of key reaching sails, leaving him floundering as illbruck passed by to take the leg. After more than 31 days of racing the margin of victory was a tiny two hours.

Dalton conceded on the dockside that illbruck's preparation, which had involved three and a half years of training, an elaborate sail programme and more than \$20 million investment, had put the Germans ahead of the game. He was dead right. Not a single sail had been broken on illbruck. The only problem had been a failure in accessing the internet after the SatCom B unit came off its mountings. But running repairs proved adequate and the all-important weather information continued to be downloaded, though as soon as ASSA ABLOY arrived in fifth place they promptly lodged a protest against illbruck for making illegal use of an internet weather site. The protest was withdrawn after a three-hour hearing, but once that was over they were protested again, this time by a race official who claimed illbruck had modified their propeller drive strut to include a weed cutting device. That protest was upheld and illbruck was fined £1,000.

Outside the protest room, controversy was raging with equal intensity. A disastrous navigational error on ASSA ABLOY saw Heiner replaced by Neal McDonald. "In the end I guess it is a product of the professionalising of the sport," Heiner said. "The stakes are higher, the pressures are higher and you have to do what you think is the best for performance."

For McDonald, skippering in the event for the first time, the change came as a mixed blessing. "As a person I am sorry to see Roy go and I have enjoyed sailing with him. The boat is where it is due to Roy's efforts and input, and it's a difficult transition for me to make - I would be lying if I said I wasn't nervous about it. But I am very proud and pleased."

Leg 2 - Cape Town to Sydney

Within hours of the start the first problem was reported. It came from illbruck and was so serious that Race HQ went on standby for an emergency rescue operation.

"The bow seemed to be lower than normal and started taking waves more frequently," the report read. "The boat got slower and slower and then we could not keep her going anymore. We eventually found an inspection port on the bow had come off somehow. The entire forward compartment was full of water." It took two hours of pumping and bailing before the situation was controlled and they could start racing again.

Three days later, Tyco was also in distress after suffering damage to the rudder. They headed for Port Elizabeth to make repairs, but discovered the rudder and bearings needed rebuilding. The boat was put on a cargo ship to Sydney.

Elsewhere, the thrill of riding the Volvo Ocean 60s through the Southern Ocean was evident in the figures. News Corp came within two miles of breaking Silk Cut's 449-mile 24-hour record and, a few hours later, Team SEB did smash the record, covering 457 miles.

While most the fleet was charging along, Keith Kilpatrick on Amer Sports One was having some serious problems with stomach pains. It was an intestinal blockage that could prove fatal if not treated. The boat was out of range for an airborne medical evacuation, but as his condition worsened the supplies of morphine and antibiotics began to dwindle. The Australian Air Force and Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre airdropped new supplies and navigator Roger Nilson, a qualified doctor, was charged with the job of setting up an intravenous drip while the boat was doing 20 knots through the Southern Ocean. As soon as Amer Sports One reached safer waters, Kilpatrick was taken off.

Team SEB was also having problems. Navigator Marcel van Triest learned his mother had died so he dived off the boat as soon as they neared Eclipse Island and headed home. His team-mates were in the lead but with 48 hours to go illbruck pulled level and News Corp's Fanstone and ASSA ABLOY's McDonald were on their tails.

After his leg one blunder, ASSA ABLOY navigator Mark Rudiger was anxious to make amends on the approach into Sydney, but again he took a gamble which went wrong and they slipped from second to sixth. "For myself, I misread the weather in some key instances, and took some larger risks to try to win rather than protect what we had," Rudiger said. "It pains me to see what the crew and management went through based on my decisions."

illbruck put in a late surge to cross the finish line first for the second time, a remarkable result after their early problems. Team SEB came in shortly after and Fanstone took third. In fifth was Amer Sports One, who broached in the final stages. Dalton was taken off the yacht on a stretcher with suspected broken ribs.

Leg 3 - Sydney to Auckland (via Hobart pit stop)

Before the fleet set off for the third leg, the crews heard of the tragic murder of 1989-90 race winner, Sir Peter Blake in the Amazon. Three weeks later, after some had visited England for Blake's funeral, the race resumed with a foray into the classic Sydney-Hobart race, characterised once more by challenging weather and much more besides.

Knut Frostad on Djouce reported a serious leak which saw their bow compartments fill with water - in much the same way as illbruck's had flooded on the second leg - and they lost four miles while crew bailed out.

Then Amer Sports Too suffered a failure of a strop in the headstay, forcing them to drop all their sails in a bid to save the mast. They carried on, planning to replace the strop in Hobart.

Things turned serious when SEB was forced to fit her emergency rudder after her main rudder became damaged and had to retire from the leg. "What has happened is very sad for us, but most important in a situation of this magnitude is ensuring the crew and the boat are safe," skipper Krantz said. "In the prevailing conditions here, we would not venture to carry on racing with an emergency rudder."

While all this was going on, McDonald was up front despite being caught in the middle of a water spout. "I was pretty scared," McDonald said. "We were heading right for the middle of it and altered course to try and avoid it. I assumed it would go downwind and it didn't, it came across the wind and we were in the middle of it. I didn't know when it was going to stop. If we'd had the sails up, there was every chance that we would have had them just all whipped off."

After a three-hour pit stop in Hobart, they set off again for Auckland though the problems for Neal's wife, Lisa, on Amer Sports Too were more complicated than first thought after a collision with a whale damaged the rudder. Added to their forestay problems, they were faced with a longer stay in Auckland.

The run to Auckland was, by comparison, plain sailing for most of the fleet and ASSA ABLOY went to the front. Down below, things on ASSA ABLOY had become a bit hairy. One of their key crew, Jason Carrington, had fallen seriously ill after collapsing on deck just after the Hobart restart. He was suffering from serious abdominal pains and fever and it was decided he should remain in his bunk, but the onboard medic, Klas Nylof, had his work cut out when two other crew also became incapacitated through illness and injury. Rather than slow them down, these problems galvanised the remaining crew, who all pulled together and stormed along to victory.

Dalton arrived in second place two hours later and Kevin Shoebridge's Tyco won a thrilling battle for third. illbruck could only manage fourth.

Leg 4 - Auckland to Rio de Janeiro

Halfway round the world, but only four tenths of the points awarded so far. illbruck topped the leaderboard by three points over Dalton's Amer Sports One, five points over Fanstone's News Corp and six over McDonald. This tantalising position prompted more than 30 crew changes, none more enthralling than the return of Paul Cayard to assist Dalton.

"He's a fast driver, he's a great tactician, he has huge energy, he is a good motivator, he will be good for me," Dalton said. "It's been a long two years for me and even though I don't feel tired I am sure I'm probably off the boil a little bit. He's got me working harder than I was expecting, which is a good thing."

The Southern Ocean beckoned. Even for the veterans, this remained a scary prospect and this time the icebergs were bigger and more frightening than ever. Even before the first sightings were made, SEB and was in trouble again having lost his mast on day 12.

By then, all the boats were worried for their safety due to the amount of ice. "I openly admit that I was seriously worried and on occasions really scared," admitted Ross Field on News Corp. "We were quite fascinated by the first iceberg we saw, but after we were seeing icebergs the size of major islands, we knew we were in deep trouble. We kept hammering on but I was seriously, seriously worried."

Some reckoned it had become too dangerous. "They put chicanes into F1 races and there ought to be a chicane in this leg because the boats drove so heavily into the ice for advantage that it is really lucky that we didn't lose a boat," said Dalton.

Thankfully all survived and illbruck was first to round Cape Horn having sailed an immaculate leg thus far. Amer Sports One, News Corp and Tyco followed behind them. On St Valentine's Day, the crew on News Corp had their hearts broken when their rudder snapped off. Earlier in the leg they had hit something – possibly ice – at 21 knots and it was not known if the rudder damage was a delayed consequence. To make matters worse, their transom also cracked, but they made repairs and pressed on.

As the fleet headed north, illbruck's lead started to evaporate, at one point losing 25 per cent of her lead to Amer Sports One in just six hours. It set up a thrilling finish. After

almost 7,000 miles of racing, the five leading boats were locked into the tightest of battles in fickle winds. It was Djui who saw an opportunity away from the fleet. They moved inshore and found a gentle breeze while ASSA ABLOY and Tyco struggled in no wind at all. This propelled Frostad into second place behind illbruck, which was the order they finished in. Dalton and Cayard could do no better than fifth, which was perhaps the biggest shock of the race so far.

Leg 5 - Rio de Janeiro to Miami

Possibly one of the hottest legs on record started with yet another drama, involving Kostecki and Krantz.

On the way out from Rio, Team SEB tried to duck under illbruck's transom, but missed and went ploughing into the German boat. No-one was hurt but illbruck's hull was left with a hole in it the size of a fist, scratch marks down the side and no aft stanchion or guardrails. The hole was filled before dark and Krantz had no option but to put his hands up and admit to the mistake.

Kostecki, meanwhile, was fuming since he was forced to slow down to make repairs. But in good illbruck tradition, it made little difference and he was soon back up front.

The heat was unbearable and every email carried plenty of detail highlighting their discomfort. Amer Sports One's Roger Nilson wrote: "Sleeping is very, very difficult. Only at night time can you sleep. At the moment it is the coolest time of day and it is 32 degrees. At the hottest time yesterday it was 37 degrees below decks."

Nine days into the leg and the three leading boats had cleared the Doldrums, where black clouds and shifty winds had proved frustrating. Then they headed into the trade winds which should have made things more interesting but didn't.

"With about 2,100 miles to Miami we are locked into the trades and the sailing has become a bit boring," Nilson said. "Often your best job is sitting on the rail to improve speed, but there is not much for the navigators and tacticians to do."

All eyes were on the Amer Sports boats. Dalton had earlier claimed that if he was ever beaten by the all-woman crew, he would "run naked down the streets of Auckland with a pineapple up my a**e". Dalton was challenged closely on this leg by McDonald's crew on Amer Sports Too and when navigator Miranda Merron put out the announcement that they had edged ahead of the boys, there was much sniggering among the fleet. The girls soon fell back, but were enjoying their best performance to date.

For most of the leg, three boats - ASSA ABLOY, Tyco and illbruck - swapped places at the front, but it was McDonald's boat that arrived first in Miami, a perfect set of sails providing an extra yard of pace over illbruck, which had seen its light wind spinnaker go overboard three days previously.

This was ASSA ABLOY'S second victory and established them as illbruck's main opposition with five legs still to race. "Sailing side by side with ASSA ABLOY and Tyco, it was very noticeable that they were similar in speed," said Kostecki. "They really have copied our sails and a lot of things that we have learned. We thought we had an advantage, but now they're catching up. It's going to be a tight race."

Leg 6 - Miami to Baltimore

The first of the short sprints started with inexplicable errors as six of the eight boats crossed the start line before the cannon had sounded. They had to return while the smug McDonalds, on ASSA ABLOY and Amer Sports Too, sailed away on the 875-mile trip to Baltimore, knowing they had a tricky time ahead in Chesapeake Bay with its fickle winds, complex currents and lobster pots set to sort the men and women from the boys and girls.

Two-time Olympic gold medallist Mark Reynolds was sailing onboard SEB for the leg and after two days he wrote: "I guess I have gotten in more sailing than I normally do in a whole year. I used to think that hiking out was hard. But moving all these sails around, in and out and up and down, is a lot more work than sailing a star boat in an hour-and-a-half race. Despite how much trouble these sails are, they make the boat go fast and I actually slept next to one last night. I guess it's a love-hate relationship."

By day three, Fanstone on News Corp had moved ahead of illbruck and ASSA ABLOY, but competition was fierce between the first three boats with less than five miles separating them. The next day, Amer Sports One had joined the fray and right to the finish the skippers sat back in a flat calm and waited for a bit of luck.

Sails were flapping, but sails on News Corp seemed to flap a little harder than the others and Fanstone managed to complete his first victory of the race, an extra cause for celebration on Ross Field's birthday.

"We didn't know we'd won it until we crossed the line," said Fanstone. "We flapped our sails better than the other guys and our flapping paid off – good flapping."

In Rio, many had thought Kostecki was unbeatable, but with three legs to go the race was as wide open as it had been after the first leg with ASSA ABLOY, Amer Sports One and News Corp running into some serious form. illbruck led by just seven points.

“We don’t need them to suffer a disaster to beat them, we just need to be better than them,” said Jason Carrington, now fully recovered on ASSA ABLOY, while Dalton vowed to stay on the podium, whatever it took.

Leg 7 - Baltimore to La Rochelle

Heading out into the open ocean again skippers were distinctly nervous as they realised how one small tactical error could make or break their chances.

The fleet emerged from Chesapeake Bay without incident and by the third day Kostecki had worked his way to the front and was ploughing through the water. Powered by 25 to 30 knots of winds, they realised they were in with a chance of setting a new record and 24 hours later they had it in the bag. A massive 484 nautical miles.

While the boys on illbruck were celebrating their good fortune, the unlucky girls on Amer Sports Too were facing total wipe out. Just over 400 miles from the coast of Canada, they heard a loud bang and watched the mast topple over, just above the second spreaders. Fortunately no-one was injured and the yacht was not in danger. They headed to Halifax in Nova Scotia, where the boat was to be transported back to the UK to be repaired before the start of the eighth leg.

illbruck continued to blaze a trail despite an outbreak of flu and ultimately would charge to a commanding win. If that was uneventful, then the battle for second was riveting as McDonald and Shoebridge traded places all the way to the finish line. It was McDonald on ASSA ABLOY who came out on top and while he was fairly happy, he would have been happier with a win “We would have liked to have been coming in here first, but we couldn’t quite manage that. illbruck sailed a faultless race. We need a bit of luck on our side, and a bit of bad luck for illbruck, but other than that we will just have to take it as it comes.”

ASSA ABLOY was eight points behind illbruck but with 16 points still up for grabs from the two remaining legs, there was still a chance.

Amer Sports Too left Halifax on a ship for Europe, giving Lisa McDonald’s crew 10 days to step a new mast and prepare for the start of the next leg. Against all the odds, they completed the repairs in Gosport and reached La Rochelle in time. When they arrived in

La Rochelle, having been battered by storms, they were given a rapturous welcome as fellow crews and the public turned out to acknowledge their bravery and determination.

Leg 8 - La Rochelle to Gothenburg

Whether it was nerves, complacency or bad luck, the crew on ASSA ABLOY was strangely off form at the start of the eighth leg and managed to snag the start buoy line around their keel.

Jason Carrington jumped over the side to free the line from the rudder, but when the boat shifted direction they realised the line was caught around the keel bulb, not the rudder. Richard Mason was also sent overboard, but he decided to swim to the trailing mark and cut the anchor line off the mark rather than risk a deep dive in the busy waters. This all took about eight minutes, but eventually the boat moved off having been required by the rules to execute a 360-degree penalty turn for hitting the mark.

The penultimate leg was due to take just five days, but the first night will stick in the minds of the crews as one of the most unpleasant of the race due to the huge swells in the Bay of Biscay, combined with 40 knots of breeze on the nose.

"We have had a tight race since the start and we are soaking wet after a slog to this left hand corner. Very unpleasant conditions have resulted in some of the crew spending time on the white telephone to God," Matt Humphries reported from News Corp.

Amer Sports One was the first yacht to round Ushant and all yachts had done so within one and a half hours, ASSA ABLOY in sixth. McDonald's challengers hauled themselves into the lead as the fleet spread out across the English Channel, but then, with 400 miles to go, the boat slowed down for no good reason. Three big fish had lodged themselves on the keel fin and illbruck's main challengers fell to third in a matter of minutes.

At the entrance to the Gothenburg archipelago, ASSA ABLOY, Tyco, illbruck and News Corp were still within a mile of each other. With two miles to go after 1,000 miles of close racing, McDonald went close to the shore to avoid the tide and chiselled out a victory in the last few seconds. Tyco was a narrow second and News Corp beat illbruck to the final podium place. Dalton could only manage fifth and was now tied for third overall with Tyco and News Corp. In all, the top five boats crossed the finish within a remarkable six minutes and 50 seconds in what was, at the time, the most thrilling finish in the history of round-the-world racing.

A win for McDonald was the perfect result, since it meant there was still a chance that illbruck could be beaten overall if ASSA ABLOY posted another victory in the ninth leg

from Gothenburg to Kiel and if illbruck came in fifth or worse. It was a big if, but this uncertainty created a storm of interest.

Leg 9 - Gothenburg to Kiel

There were some radical moves to optimise speed ahead of the final sprint, including some wholesale crew changes. Fanstone dropped two, Frostad three, Shoebridge one, though Kostecki was unwavering in his selections. Same crew, as it had been from day one. Inside, the boats were completely empty, with anything that wasn't needed by the rules taken off.

There was pandemonium at the start with 2,000 spectator boats making life tricky for the skippers, who were confined to a narrow channel. Neal McDonald almost collided with a spectator boat and then promptly parked up in a windless zone. Disaster. ASSA ABLOY was sixth, five places behind the leader Djui, who was four miles ahead of illbruck and 29 miles ahead of Tyco at the back of the fleet. The girls in Amer Sports Too were fourth, but they were ahead of the boys in Amer Sports One. Everyone was hoping they could maintain that lead to the end because everyone wanted to see Grant Dalton "walk naked up the street with a pineapple up my a**e".

The course was shortened so the race would finish in daylight and Djui brought some romance into the tale at the 11th hour by winning the leg, Frostad's first victory of the race.

illbruck meanwhile came second and won the race to take the 2001-02 Volvo Ocean Race trophy having posted four wins, two seconds and three fourth places and the most points. ASSA ABLOY was six points behind, but McDonald and Rudiger were pleased that, after the disastrous first leg, they came back with such intensity.

"We all have mixed feelings about the end," said Rudiger. "We're all ready for closure, and to stop moving from boat to hotel to boat etc. But we'll also miss the race, the singular focus, the awesome sailing, and the achievement. For us especially it has been fun moving up the leaderboard and proving our worth to our sponsors, shore crew, and friends and family."

Jez Fanstone, skipper of News Corp, brought up the rear and cursed his decision to go west of Anholt Island. He finished fifth overall as Amer Sports One, who took fifth on the leg, came third on the final podium. "It's been torture," a glum looking Fanstone said on the dockside. "After 32,000 miles of ocean racing, it comes down to a buoy-filled lottery to a certain extent. But all credit to the Amer Sports One guys, they did a nice job and they got a result and hats off to them."



Amer Sports Too took the wooden spoon after a courageous effort. Despite all the late and chaotic preparations, Lisa McDonald's crew defied the odds to complete the course, battling with the worse of the elements. Dalton finished his sixth round-the-world race with a pineapple stuffed down the back of his trousers.

Race Nine: 2005-06

Vigo – Cape Town – Melbourne – Wellington – Rio de Janeiro – Baltimore – New York – Portsmouth – Rotterdam – Gothenburg

Distance: 31,350

Winner: ABN AMRO ONE



The sailors wanted speed, excitement and an evolutionary step on from what they had grown used to in the Volvo Ocean 60 class of boat. How they would question those requests over the coming months. When the Volvo Open 70s were announced they sounded radical, given their increased size, sail area and keels that could cant 40 degrees to port and starboard. But it was when these boats first hit the water for testing that the alarm sounded.

“This thing is like a dirt bike or a big skiff, it is so agile and sensitive. It's violent and really fast,” said Curtis Blewett. He had sailed with Paul Cayard on EF Language's winning campaign in 1997-98 and now he was back as Disney entered the ring to promote their latest Pirates of the Caribbean film. The boat was named after the movie and Cayard was



brought in to lead their assault. Blewett was his bowman, deployed to stand at the sharp end of this new boat.

"It is a beast, a man-eater, whatever you want to call it," Blewett added in Spain before the start. "They will chew up crew. There will be a few injuries this race."

He would be proved right. There would also be plenty of controversy over the new hardware, particularly on the subject of the keels, but before the fleet departed most were blissfully unaware of the volume those debates would reach.

Also new to the event was the inclusion of in-port races. In order to vary the challenge of the race and increase race activity during the stopovers, it was decided that a short close-combat race would be held during selected stopovers. With some of the best round-the-buoys sailors in the world taking part in 2005-06, they promised to be a valuable addition.

In addition to Cayard, whose boat was last on the water and relatively untried, there was Bouwe Bekking. He was leading a campaign by movistar, the Spanish telecommunications giant, and had already crossed the Southern Ocean as part of the team's extensive training. This would be his fifth lap and by far the most eventful.

The Dutch bank ABN AMRO had also entered and thrown plenty of cash behind their two-boat campaign. Their primary boat, ABN AMRO ONE, was skippered by Kiwi Mike Sanderson, who had won the maxi class of the 1993-94 race as part of the New Zealand Endeavour crew and finished second with Merit Cup four years later. ABN AMRO TWO was geared towards giving youth a chance and 1,800 young sailors applied for places in the team's global auditioning process. They were skippered by French solo sailing star Seb Josse.

Elsewhere, Neal McDonald was back, this time skippering Ericsson's crew of stellar names, while Torben Grael was throwing his hat into the realms of offshore racing. With five Olympic medals – two golds – the Brazilian was the most decorated Olympic sailor of all time by the time he took charge of the modestly-funded Brasil 1. Australia's Grant Wharington was late to the party, overcoming funding issues to arrive in Spain shortly before the start with his Sunergy and Friends team.

Leg 1 - Vigo to Cape Town

"You can't win a round-the-world race on the first night but you can lose it," said Paul Cayard shortly after the fleet left. His words were prophetic. The fleet had come charging out of Vigo as the public saw the frightening power of the new boats.

A week earlier it had been something of an anti-climax when they were unveiled in the opening in-port race, which was contested in desperately light winds. Ericsson won the day from Brasil 1 and Pirates, while the ABN AMRO boats, designed by Juan Kouyoumdjian with a wide transom and two rudders, were stuck at the back and looking vulnerable to gentle breezes.

Little did the knockers know that in moderate to heavy reaching conditions, the Dutch boats would have an extra gear on the rest. This was demonstrated as they both screamed to the front early on and ABN AMRO TWO took the lead on the first night.

But that was far from the talking point. Pirates were out of the leg on the first night after they cracked a bulkhead and suffered a leak around their keel. They headed for Portugal before flying the boat to South Africa.

Half an hour later, movistar came off a wave with a bang. A rudder, daggerboard and the front of the keel were all damaged. There was also major damage to the mountings for the keel hydraulics. It appeared they had collided with something and they retired from racing and were shipped to Cape Town.

Before the first weekend was over, Sunergy broke the fitting that holds the boom to the mast and pitted in Madeira. They suspended racing for 15 hours and were 700 miles behind the pack upon resuming.

All hell broke loose in the media and internet forums as pundits discussed the breakages. But at the front of the fleet the benefits of these boats were obvious.

ABN AMRO ONE was showing great power. Sanderson later commented that his boat's superior speed may have played an indirect role in the breakages on movistar and Pirates. "They had to watch us come through flat, fast, in control and comfortably carrying half as much sail again as they were. That couldn't have been good to watch. I think they probably said, 'We've got to hang onto the ABN guys', so tried to match us and blew their boats apart."

ABN AMRO ONE took maximum points at the Fernando de Noronha scoring gate – the top four boats were within an hour of each other – and went on to dominate but

Sanderson later admitted a fire broke out onboard and, according to the crew, came within “five seconds” of being uncontrollable. Navigator Stan Honey, world-renowned for his technological innovations, re-wired the electronics. “Stan was our hero,” Sanderson said. “The guy is seriously smart.”

Sanderson charged to the high latitudes, leaving their left turn to Cape Town late. Brasil 1 had cut the corner and took a brief lead but the ABN boats held the weather aces. Both Dutch boats broke the monohull 24-hour world speed record - ABN AMRO ONE eventually clocked 546 miles in 24 hours – and the pair, led by Sanderson, were first into Cape Town.

But the dramas weren't over. Ericsson reported a failure in their keel system that allowed it to swing wildly on the approach to Cape Town. They managed to lock the keel and trundled in. Sunergy, a distant last, still managed a faster time than the first yacht home in the previous Race.

Leg 2 - Cape Town to Melbourne

After ABN AMRO ONE won a wild in-port race in Cape Town, in which boats were repeatedly flattened by 40-knot winds, the start to leg two could not have been any different. There was almost no breeze as the fleet embarked on a leg that would take these boats into the Southern Ocean. It took two hours to complete a two-mile short course and at times the boats went backwards in the adverse current. It was not a sign of things to come.

movistar made a good start and took a more northerly course once they passed the Cape of Good Hope, but ultimately the weather favoured the boats in the south. Ericsson and Brasil 1 had both made good progress at the higher latitudes when calamity struck. First, barely 300 miles from Cape Town, Ericsson reported they were heading back because of hydraulic problems with their keel. They would finish the leg on a container ship. Then Brasil 1 discovered a crack in the deck close to the mast and returned to land to make a repair.

At the front of the fleet, ABN AMRO ONE was flying. They had been the first boat to escape a high-pressure system and by day nine their lead had jumped from 16 miles to 380 miles in the past four days. Sanderson was first at the scoring gate off the Kerguelen Islands and ploughed on.

Owing to the terrifying quantities of ice found on the last race, the race committee had added two ice gates to this leg to keep the fleet north. No-one other than the enthusiastic “kids” on ABN AMRO TWO complained too loudly. In the event, it had little impact on the

speeds reached. Indeed, ABN AMRO TWO smashed the world 24-hour record, setting a new mark at an incredible 563 miles.

“There is something exhilarating about blasting through waves in the darkness of night with very little guidance but some numbers illuminated on the mast,” wrote Luke Molloy from ABN AMRO TWO. “As the boat skips through 25, 28, 30 knots of boat speed, my grip on the wheel tightens, my knees bend and body tenses up a little because my instinct feels the inevitable..... NOSEDIVE! 31, 32 and BOOF! My comrades and I are jolted forward like we have hit a brick wall then smashed back by the engulfing water sloshing down the deck. Immediately, we are off again down the next wave and the cycle is repeated, 25, 28, 30..... This has now become another part of life on the street fighter tour of the world, along with being constantly wet, sleep deprived and generally in a little discomfort.”

A high-pressure system off Australia saw Sanderson's lead over Josse eroded to 16 miles, but they held on to claim maximum points at the second scoring gate and went on to win the leg. The biggest shock was that after such a huge leg, the “kids” were just four hours behind. “I think they stole our show a bit,” Sanderson joked at the finish.

Meanwhile, out on the water, a huge series of problems had struck. Both Pirates and movistar had to dock in Albany after yet more issues with their hydraulic keels rams, while Brasil 1 having fought their way back into the fleet, was dismasted. Their boat travelled the final few thousand miles across the Australian wilderness on a truck. Movistar got back on the water and beat Pirates into Melbourne but debate about the breakdowns was just getting started.

Leg 3 - Melbourne to Wellington

The repeated breakdowns owing to the canting keels had caused some fierce - and often ill-informed - discussion in the media and online communities. The race organisation took the step of calling all the skippers to a meeting in Melbourne to discuss if changes were needed to the rules, but, to their relief, the teams unanimously agreed that the problems were caused by their own decisions.

Furthermore, the skippers were fully in support of the new, pioneering boats. “As far as I can remember, there aren't a lot of points of land named after people who sat at home and criticised Christopher Columbus,” wrote Paul Cayard. Mike Sanderson added: “A fantastic race boat has been delivered. We have just got to work out what pace you can drive a Volvo Open 70.” Case closed as far as the sailors were concerned.

On the water, things were looking ominous. ABN AMRO ONE had won the Melbourne in-port race after Brasil 1 briefly threatened a fairytale result, ensuring they had won every scoring opportunity since the first in-port race. And the next leg would be a race to Sanderson's homeland. The finish would prove spectacular. The six-strong fleet – Sunergy, by now known as ING Real Estate Brunel, had withdrawn to make modifications and would return in the US – were bunched as they entered Bass Strait and prepared for a beating.

The weather was horrendous and ABN AMRO TWO bowman Gerd-Jan Poortman took the full force of one particularly big wave. "I was checking on damaged stanchions and life-lines when we stuck the bow into a wave doing more than 20 knots. I was attached by a safety harness but the wave smashed me down the deck into the daggerboard. I found myself with the board between my leg, not able to move." He had dislocated his tailbone and needed a crew-mate to stitch up a hefty wound on his head as the boat did 20 knots.

ABN AMRO ONE and movistar were at the front of the fleet for almost the entire race until the Dutch boat's superior sail inventory kicked in and sent her 30 miles clear. With just the Cook Strait to be negotiated, Sanderson looked like he had the win. But, surprisingly, the wind fell from 28 knots to two in half an hour. movistar soon passed them to the north and one of the great battles was on.

Bekking led for six hours, but a wind shift brought Sanderson level as the pair came into the view of thousands of spectators lining Wellington's waterfront. Bekking's lead was less than a boat length after more than 1,400 miles of racing. Their margin at the gun was nine seconds – the closest in race history. Pirates finished third, followed by Brasil 1 and ABN AMRO TWO who, as a measure of their progress, were disappointed to have only beaten the star-studded crew on Ericsson.

Leg 4 - Wellington to Rio de Janeiro

As always, this was the big one. And, true to form, it was packed with drama.

The ride out of Wellington was blistering, the yachts almost immediately pitched into the kind of downhill charging that dominates a typical day in the Southern Ocean. Brasil 1 had set out to the north with ABN AMRO TWO, but Sanderson had taken a hard southerly course and lost 43 miles on the fleet. Like many of Stan Honey's gambles, it paid off. They were 224 miles clear of their sister ship by the time they reached the first ice gate and set a course for Cape Horn in 50-knot winds. "We did four consecutive days of 500-plus miles," said ABN AMRO ONE bowman Justin Slattery. "It was unheard of for monohull sailing."

For Sanderson, this was a wonderful surprise. His boat was geared towards reaching but now it was racking up the best numbers downwind. Life behind him was not so rosy. Ericsson suffered one of the worst fates in sailing – a Chinese gybe at night. They had just righted after a wipe out at 25 knots when the boat swung out of control and onto its side. “Terrifying,” wrote Neal McDonald. “I was below deck and there the whole world was upside down. It’s a very peculiar sensation, walking on people in bunks rather than the floor. My first thought was for the four guys on deck. I stuck my head out of the hatch – you know you won’t see anything - so you listen for voices. You don’t know what to expect. Those are moments I never want to repeat. I had no idea if they’d still be there or still be alive.” Thankfully they were and within a couple of hours were racing again.

The fleet charged on to Cape Horn and the temperatures continued to drop as Pirates and movistar started to threaten ABN AMRO TWO’s 24-hour run. At 0300 one morning it all went wrong for Bekking. A call shrieked through the yacht that they were sinking and when Chris Nicholson leapt from his bunk he disappeared up to his waist in freezing water.

The “bomb doors” around the keel had failed and water exploded through the watertight keel box into the yacht like a burst fire hydrant. Ericsson and Brasil 1 were put on standby for a rescue as Nicholson, a trained electrical engineer, attempted to activate the emergency pumps. The electrics had flooded so he had to wire the pumps directly to the battery terminal or the boat would sink in a matter of minutes. He heroically took more than 20 24-volt shocks before the pumps came to life and the boat was saved. They headed for Ushuaia, Argentina for repairs and a long talk between the crew over whether their injury-prone yacht was safe enough to finish the race in. “That drama was one of the very worst moments of my career,” said Jono Swain. “Awful.”

By day 12, ABN AMRO ONE had passed the Horn with Pirates in second ahead of Brasil 1, ABN AMRO TWO and Ericsson. A tactical race ensued up the coast as the winds went light and the difference between first and fifth shrunk from 200 miles to 50 miles. ABN AMRO ONE held on to win their third leg and Brasil 1 fell from second to fourth in the final few miles, Pirates and ABN AMRO TWO profiting from their misery. Ericsson finished the gruelling leg in fifth and big changes were on the horizon.

Leg 5 - Rio de Janeiro to Baltimore

Ericsson was not in a good way. Their results had been way below par and on the crossing from Wellington rumours were rife of disharmony between some members of the crew. While the latter may not be so unusual in such an environment, set against the backdrop of the results it added to the suspicion in Brazil that changes would be made.

True enough, the job of skipper was taken from Neal McDonald and given to John Kostecki, leaving the Englishman as watch leader.

Elsewhere, there was a slight feeling of optimism in the fleet. With over half the points still up for grabs, the remaining legs were expected to be fought in predominantly light winds – conditions in which ABN AMRO ONE did not excel. Alas, Sanderson won the Rio de Janeiro in-port race and didn't seem too concerned looking ahead. "Bring it on," he said. "We're not going to get complacent, I'll promise you that. There's a long way to go. But we don't fear anyone."

And yet the leg couldn't have started much worse for ABN AMRO ONE. A halyard lock failed in the opening hour and sent their headsail tumbling down to the deck. It cost Sanderson a vital 18 minutes in the shifty tactical battle ahead, but with reaching conditions sweeping the course he was back where he expected to be within 24 hours.

movistar, meanwhile, had moved inshore of the fleet and the move paid off. Navigator Andrew Cape and Bouwe Bekking were delighted as their yacht charged from 22 miles behind the leader to 25 miles ahead. Bekking has made a habit of taking bold tactical moves in his career but this move, while breaking from the fleet to an extent, was also conservative as his instinct was to hug the coast a lot tighter. "If we had done that we would have gone 200 miles clear in days," he said.

Ultimately, his good move was spoiled when he was caught under a cloud, handing the initiative back to Sanderson. Bekking got back in the battle as the clouds regularly reshuffled the pack and after six days was second to round the scoring gate at Fernando de Noronha. First place? ABN AMRO ONE by one minute and 25 seconds.

Bekking said: "I have to admit, even though I hated it happening to us, it was a pretty awesome sight to see them rolling over the top of us with only one boat length between us. Raw power!"

The Doldrums were generous as the fleet passed through without trouble but then something peculiar happened. "Jerry Kirby had only just told us nothing ever happened in the Bermuda Triangle when hell broke loose," wrote Anthony Merrington from Pirates. "We lost all power, the keel wouldn't cant and we were in the middle of a rain storm. All you could hear was guys shouting, 'No Bermuda Triangle, huh Jerry?'

The fleet battled on to the finish and despite signs of another epic duel between Sanderson and Bekking, ABN AMRO ONE was able to hold on for a five-hour win that put them within touching distance of the title. "Previously it's been easy to justify a loss if you didn't see the opposition pass you," Sanderson said. "You could say they had better

breeze. When you actually see someone go past you, you know they're faster. There is now no argument that we were dominant."

Leg 6 - Annapolis to New York

Annapolis shared the staging of the stopover with Baltimore and were treated to a rare sight for their efforts – ABN AMRO ONE losing a sailing race. In fact they didn't even make the top three as movistar strengthened her grip on second place on the leaderboard with a thrilling in-port race win, followed by Brasil 1 and Paul Cayard's Pirates.

Offshore, it looked like the impossible could be about to repeat itself. In front of an enormous crowd of 35,000 people on 3,500 boats, the sailing capital of America watched on as ABN AMRO ONE struggled at the start of leg six. The fleet had been bolstered by Grant Wharington – his refitted yacht was now known as Brunel – and his wide boat was joined by the two ABN yachts at the back of the fleet in the light winds.

Brasil 1 led the narrower Farr-designed boats on their way and made some good distance, but Stan Honey made a smart call on ABN AMRO ONE to claw back a mile and one "awesome sail change" later they were back in the pack. The challenge was far from over for any of them, though.

The route to New York was best summed up by Simon Fisher on ABN AMRO TWO. "We have seen everything from flat calms to 55-knot squalls," he wrote. "We have spent the majority of our time pounding upwind, getting tossed around like pancakes as we struggle to hold on to the boat."

Despite the lack of comfort – Pirates' Jerry Kirby said the motion of a Volvo Open 70 going upwind was the most violent he had known in 30 years of offshore racing – the fleet was still heading against the wind at a remarkable speed of 11 knots. Quicker than everyone else was, of course, ABN AMRO ONE. Sanderson entered the Hudson River 17 miles clear of Pirates, but by then the focus was on the overall race for second. Cayard, Bekking, Grael and McDonald, who was back in charge of Ericsson, were separated by just two miles as another thrilling finish materialised. Pirates was able to hold on to second, but Brasil 1, helped by the brilliance of navigator Marcel van Triest in negotiating a dangerous shoal, were able to pinch third and Ericsson crept ahead of movistar. Those four boats were separated by 14 minutes. ABN AMRO TWO was beset by gear failures and finished behind Brunel.

Significantly, Pirates had overtaken movistar in the standings by half a point. "This is going to be a hell of a race," Bekking said.

"A lot can happen from here to the finish," added Cayard.

Leg 7 - New York to Portsmouth

The talking point coming into the one of the most devastating legs in the history of the race was all about the battle for second. Pirates had the lead and, crucially, movistar would be forced to cross the start line two hours after the fleet as a penalty for repairing a damaged winch system during the pit-stop.

The skies at the start were grey and the mood mixed. The first 1,000 miles would be another battle against the wind, sailors knocked off their feet on deck and rattled around like dice down below in the dark. But thereafter the downwind ride was forecast to be as good as anything experienced so far, possibly even consistent enough for a record attempt. In both circumstances, this was expected to be a cold leg.

After four days at sea, Bekking wrote an email to land. "Can we please go back to the Southern Ocean?" it read. "It is freezing, freezing cold here." Movistar had found her way back into contention by this point, but soon Stan Honey was about to make one of those race-winning calls. He set a very expensive course just east of south, a very sharp angle that sent ABN AMRO ONE spiralling down the leaderboard to last. Their gamble wasn't helped by a collision with a whale. But by day six Paul Cayard had noticed that Sanderson's southerly route was going to come off. "That was a smart move," he said. "They figured out the weather better than the rest of us." Ericsson was with them in the south and loving the prospect, but to the north disaster was about to strike.

An uncharacteristic low-pressure system had formed and was set to rattle the fleet with 35 to 40 knots from the west. At around 0200 on day eight, May 18, ABN AMRO TWO was 1,300 miles from the finish in fifth place when the wind jumped from 12 knots to 25. Josse was steering and gave the call for a sail change and then for the crew to go down below one at a time to fit their safety harnesses. Hans Horrevoets was sitting on the sail stack trimming the spinnaker and waiting for his turn when the yacht ploughed into a wave at 25 knots. The boat submerged and when it resurfaced the spinnaker was flapping and Horrevoets was missing. After 40 minutes of extraordinary seamanship Horrevoets was located but the crew could not resuscitate him. A few hours later ABN AMRO TWO resumed their course for Portsmouth, unaware they were about to be sucked into another almighty drama.

On day 10, with Jono Swain at the wheel, movistar came off a big wave with a huge bang. Water was surging into the boat and once again it was through the keel. The keel structure was broken and the seas were huge with waves upwards of six metres high. A

storm of 50 knots was due in the next 24 hours and there was no way of knowing if the keel would stay in the boat. If it didn't they would go down in seconds. ABN AMRO TWO responded to the call and a day after the bang, the crew of movistar abandoned ship into a life raft before transferring to Josse's yacht. "The hardest decision I have taken in my life," said Bekking. "I hope Seb (Josse) can take a little comfort in that they have saved 10 lives."

At the front, meanwhile, ABN AMRO ONE had wrapped up their sixth leg win in seven. And they had made sure of the title. "For me this is my Olympic medal, my Mount Everest, my childhood dream," Sanderson said. "I have been trying to hold back my emotions this entire race and now I can let them out."

It had been one of the most masterful sporting victories of the year but it was undeniably a bittersweet moment.

Leg 8 - Portsmouth to Rotterdam

ABN AMRO ONE was in no mood to take it easy in the Portsmouth in-port race, withstanding the rough weather to take their fourth inshore crown from the six sprints so far, but the forecast could not be worse for their team's return to home waters. The route up the west coast of Ireland and around the tip of Scotland had the potential to be the toughest of the lot, exposing the fleet to another battering. But by race day there was no wind whatsoever. Twenty minutes after the start the six boats were crawling and over the six days – with decent winds the 1,500-mile leg could be completed in half the time – they barely went faster.

Torben Grael made a decent start but was soon pegged back by Ericsson, whose large British contingent were familiar with the Solent. McDonald's coast-hugging strategy pulled his team in front but that first night anchors were regularly thrown over the side to combat the adverse current. Indeed, after 20 hours only 120 miles had been covered.

Minor gains and losses were made – ABN AMRO ONE made a good play by taking the long way around a high-pressure system while the Farr boats struggled through it – but the going was painfully slow. "It is hard to believe that three weeks ago we were sailing these waters in 30 to 40 knots and five-metre waves," wrote Horacio Carabelli from Brasil 1. "Today we had a visit from a pigeon. Every time it flew away it would come back. Let's hope this voyage is not too long and we have a food shortage because there are sailors talking about how fat it looks."

After four days the bunched boats reached the Fastnet Rock – only seven miles separated first from last with Brasil 1 leading and Sanderson at the back – but at the top of Scotland a weather system caused a huge split. A small trough developed in the high-pressure system and left Pirates, ABN AMRO TWO and Brunel stranded while the front group opened up a 60-mile lead.

Brasil 1 took the initiative and forged a lead they would never lose, beating Sanderson by just three minutes. It was a thrilling finish to a leg most the sailors wanted to forget. “This is a great moment,” said Graef. “We have had a lot of battles in this race but we have got to a level where we have won a leg. That is a very big achievement.”

Leg 9 - Rotterdam to Gothenburg

Sanderson had endured the frustration of delivering two rare defeats on special occasions. First, he had finished second into his native New Zealand and then he took second again coming into his team’s home port. If that was bothering him in the slightest it was surely compensated for with another in-port race win, seeing off Brasil 1 to emphatically claim the award for the best inshore boat.

Offshore, ABN AMRO ONE’s dominance had never been in doubt and, as with the winners of most events, preparation was the primary reason. “Tradition has it that the boat that wins the first leg will win the race,” said their watch captain Mark Christensen, completing his record-breaking third win. “I think that is quite likely the case as this is the boat that has done the most preparation. Some of the key decisions we made in the first year and during the build-up to the start showed all the way through.”

In the battle for the smaller places, Brasil 1 could still catch Pirates so Cayard set off to stick with Graef after an early divergence. Thankfully for Sanderson the war had been won because he was off to a terrible start at the back of the fleet with suspected damage to the fairing on his keel.

The wind was variable and with one missed shift Pirates fell to the bottom of the leaderboard and Brasil 1 went top, a situation that would see Graef steal second overall. Cayard went for broke and tacked for the coast, setting up a thrilling final night after a lap around the planet.

The move paid off as Cayard soon jumped to third – ABN AMRO TWO’s incredible race looked to be getting even better as they opened a 15-mile lead on Brasil 1 – and then the order changed again. Just 15 miles from the finish Josse parked. “It was torture,” said



ABN AMRO TWO's Andrew Lewis. "We saw a dot on the horizon behind us and then watched it turn into a triangle. There was nothing we could do."

It was Pirates. They were heading for the lead and when they took it they didn't give it back. The final margin was four minutes – another breathtaking finish.

"This is a great leg win and a well-earned second-placed finish overall," said Cayard.

Sanderson, meanwhile, finished last. "We were last in the first in-port race and we're last here," he said. "I guess it's what you do in the middle that counts." He was right.

Race Ten: 2008-09

Alicante – Cape Town – Cochin – Singapore – Qingdao – Rio de Janeiro – Boston – Galway – Marstrand – Stockholm – St Petersburg

Distance: 37,000

Winner: Ericsson 4



If the new class of boat was the cause of hot debate before and during the 2005-06 race, then it was comfortably matched by the furore kicked up by the route in the 2008-09 edition.

Economics drove the fleet and their sponsors north from Cape Town, dispensing with a charge across the Southern Ocean to Australasia in order to tap the markets of India, Singapore and China. The incredible media figures posted at the end of the race would vindicate the move but, at the time, traditionalists bemoaned the change. Their argument was that by reducing the time in the Southern Ocean the organisers had tamed the challenge. Leg four would end that debate in chilling style while the extra equator crossings and the leg five marathon from Qingdao to Rio – at 12,300 miles it was the longest in race history – offered a whole new set of challenges.

Another change that raised eyebrows was the inclusion of StealthPlay. This play allowed

a yacht to hide a tactical move by disappearing from position reports for 12 hours. It could be played in legs one, two, five, six and seven and by the end of the race it had regularly been proven to be a position-deciding tool.

As for the skippers, it was the usual mix of new and old. Torben Grael was back, but in radically different circumstances. Whereas Brasil 1 had enjoyed modest funding and not much preparation time, this edition he headed Ericsson's big budget, two-boat campaign. They had the most time to prepare and had recruited Juan Kouyoumdjian, the winning designer from 2005-06. John Kostecki had been due to lead the international crew on Ericsson 4, but he resigned more than a year before the start and Grael stepped in.

On his sister ship was Anders Lewander, a race novice. His Nordic crew was up against it from the start when they were found to have a non-compliant keel fin in Alicante and would be penalised one point per in-port race, one for each scoring gate and two for every leg until they replaced it. They recovered in incredible fashion.

Bouwe Bekking was back for his sixth lap, leading Telefónica Blue. Memories of movistar's demise in the Atlantic were still fresh, but Bekking was considered the main threat to Grael. Fernando Echávarri, an Olympic gold medallist, was put in charge of Telefónica Black, while Ian Walker, a two-time Olympic medallist, led the modestly-resourced Green Dragon. Multiple world champion Ken Read was back, having sailed four legs on Ericsson in the previous race, but this time he was leading PUMA's foray into ocean racing. His crew was top notch.

The Russians were represented by a private entry. Millionaire Oleg Zherebtsov, who had made his money in the supermarket industry, dreamed of racing around the world and put Andreas Hanakamp in charge. A late arrival was Delta Lloyd, the old ABN AMRO ONE boat skippered by Ireland's Ger O'Rourke. Funding issues and lack of preparation time made them huge outsiders in the betting.

It would prove to be a fascinating race and one that, for the first time, could be properly told to an outside audience. The embedding of a journalist on each boat was not unanimously backed by the sailors, but the end result for fans, and sponsors, was priceless.

Leg 1 - Alicante to Cape Town

Only the cruel would have felt no sympathy for Bouwe Bekking as night fell on the first day. His team had won the race's opening in-port race a week earlier, but three years on from his first-night calamity with movistar one of his yacht's tiller arms had broken, forcing Bekking to dock for 12 hours to make repairs.

"I'm not very happy," Bekking said. "But we have to carry on and see if we can claw back the lost miles."

Although he couldn't know it at the time, fortune was perhaps smiling on him. The first two boats through the Strait of Gibraltar - the two Ericsson boats - were confronted with flat seas and still air. The mileage lost could have been worse.

Out into the Atlantic, Ericsson 4 held the advantage, but it was tenuous. On the approach to the Canary Islands, it wasn't clear whether an easterly or westerly passage was best. In fact, the tactical situation inspired the first StealthPlay of the leg when Green Dragon "disappeared" for 12 hours. Walker would later say the reason for the StealthPlay was that he thought they had made a mistake and he wanted to delay confirmation of his poor positioning to the fleet.

But that may have been disingenuous. Walker's team made a sharp right - becoming the westernmost boat in the process - as the fleet lined up for the Doldrums. It paid off as Walker's crew crossed the Doldrums first and then took first place at the Fernando de Noronha scoring gate. Ericsson 4 and PUMA were next to pass.

Fortunate to remain among the leading group was Ericsson 4, who was forced to detour to the Cape Verde Islands in the opening week to evacuate Tony Mutter. The New Zealander was suffering from a bad infection in his knee and the team lost roughly 50 miles by dropping him off. "If the infection got worse and I got blood poisoning I could have lost the leg," Mutter said in Cape Town before rejoining the crew.

At the head of the fleet the boats were separated by just a handful of miles as they monitored the development of a low pressure system that would power them east to Africa. As the low overtook the fleet, the mileage began to tick up. In a startling display, Ericsson 4 edged ahead and then obliterated the 24-hour monohull record of 562 miles with an astounding 596.6 miles run. Torben Grael charged on and took the first leg. On Blue, Bekking saw that his boat, which had excelled in the lighter breezes, was struggling in the heavier, downwind conditions. They finished a disappointing fifth.

And his teammate, Fernando Echávarri, was dealing with problems on Black, having broken a rudder after launching off a wave. As the boat rounded up, the bow-sprit tore away and a daggerboard was damaged. They finished last. PUMA took second place and Ericsson 3 raced past Green Dragon for third. Delta Lloyd could only finish seventh and Ger O'Rourke, citing prior commitments, stepped aside for veteran Roberto Bermudez to take over as skipper.

Ericsson 4 had looked incredible, but it was unanimously agreed that the design similarities in this second generation of Volvo Open 70 boats would make for

exceptionally close racing.

Leg 2 - Cape Town to India

A scoring gate to the east meant a foray into the Southern Ocean before heading north for India and it didn't take long for the big winds and waves to take a toll. Green Dragon broke her steering gear, resulting in a crash gybe. Similarly, Team Russia had a famous wipe-out, all the footage captured and published on the race website. Then Ian Walker's Green Dragon broke her boom, while PUMA launched off a wave and came down with a sickening thud - the main longitudinal support frame was broken and the team would have to slow down to make repairs.

In the high winds, Ericsson 4 again proved to be the class of the fleet, racing through the gate at top speed. Ericsson 3, racing with a new keel, crossed second, while Green Dragon, boomless, made a remarkable surge to take third. The Telefonica twins once again struggled in the big conditions; Blue was fifth, Black was sixth, but both reported improved performance. The injured PUMA had to settle for seventh while Delta Lloyd brought up the rear of the fleet.

As the teams turned north the temperatures climbed and the winds eased. By the end of the first week, the Doldrums loomed with the Ericsson boats still at the front and Green Dragon and PUMA chasing. Blue started to show signs of life, but then a broken daggerboard appeared to hinder the team, which started slipping much further west than skipper Bouwe Bekking wanted.

With the fleet compressing in the Doldrums, it was still anyone's game. Then Ericsson 4 disappeared under a rain cloud and popped out the other side with a 30-mile lead. The forecast was grim for Telefonica Blue in the west, while Team Russia, gambling on an easterly passage, was forecast to come out strongly.

But the forecasts were wrong. In the event, first Ericsson 4 and then Telefonica Blue were beneficiaries of westerly winds that threw them towards the continent. As the third week of the leg began, the interesting battle was for third place (the top two - Ericsson 4 and Telefonica Blue - were long gone and would finish in that order). Ericsson 3 took the remaining podium spot while Green Dragon, PUMA and Delta Lloyd were engaged in a dogfight for fourth. In fact, this triumvirate was so focused on each other that Telefonica Black found an opening.

In the best use of a StealthPlay to date, skipper Fernando Echavarri and navigator Roger Nielsen disappeared with just over 100 miles to go. The team turned towards the coast and used the morning sea breeze to sail around the three boats in front of them. PUMA

gave chase, while Delta Lloyd squeezed past Green Dragon for sixth place. And poor Team Russia, wallowing in their easterly Doldrums crossing, trailed the fleet by a disappointing margin.

Leg 3 - India to Singapore

Ericsson 4 had laid down a marker, taking each of the first two legs. But Bekking's second-placed finish into India had rejuvenated his crew on Blue and he was in a determined mood as the fleet cast off.

As the teams streaked down the continent and turned left into the Bay of Bengal, Blue built an early lead well to the south of the rest of the fleet while Ericsson 4 and PUMA led the group to the north. It was a huge gamble for Bekking as he split from the other seven boats. "It's easy to go from penthouse to sh*thouse," Bekking said.

If Bekking was stressed, it was nothing compared to the feelings on Delta Lloyd. A keel ram had separated from the bulkhead, limiting the team to sailing with the keel pinned in the middle. At first skipper Roberto Bermudez looked for a port in order to make repairs but ploughed on.

At the front the racing was intense. The fleet converged as they approached the scoring gate, but Blue still had to close the leverage to the boats in the north. He had gambled on a late wind shift that would catapult him north and retain his lead but the shift died shortly after it arrived and Ericsson 4 stole the initiative at the death to cross the gate first.

"I am sick and tired of getting beaten by them," Bekking said in an email after crossing in second.

The fleet turned right and entered the busy Malacca Strait for the final push to Singapore. It is one of the busiest shipping channels in the world, dominated by variable weather, floating debris and a reputation for piracy. Of those problems, the weather came to the fore and positions changed almost every hour.

Ericsson eked out a 42-mile lead at one point, while Blue, having been stuck motionless under a cloud for two hours, fell to third. But then it went wrong for Grael. With a small group of islands ahead, Grael went offshore and Bekking, swayed by his homework into the area, hugged the coast. Within six hours Bekking was just three miles behind, sailing neck-and-neck with Ericsson 3 and going seven knots faster than Grael. One position report later and Bekking was leading and Ericsson 4 was fourth with barely 200 miles to go.

By December 22, the last of 10 days at sea, the top four were separated by two miles. Blue led from Ericsson 3, who had Graef astern, while PUMA was fourth. At the next report Blue was fourth and PUMA led. For symmetry, the middle pair also swapped places. The order lasted three hours until Blue reclaimed the lead at the next report and pushed PUMA back into second. By the finish they had a 17-minute cushion and the next three, in the order of PUMA, Ericsson 3 and Ericsson 4, were bracketed by three minutes.

"It is a very sweet victory. Very special - just before Christmas - a nice little gift for us," Bekking said. "Incredible race. We are back in this."

Leg 4 - Singapore to Qingdao

Graef wrestled back some of the momentum by winning the Singapore in-port race, edging out PUMA and Blue, but everyone knew such small points could be made irrelevant in the next leg. Unmarked shallows were part of the problem, but the real difficulty would be found in a stretch of water known locally as Kuroshio - Black Tide - which is a strong current that flows through the Luzon Strait and in the direction of Japan. Every winter, when it meets the freezing winds heading the other way from Siberia, huge, steep waves are whipped up. The six boats - Team Russia had suspended racing because of a lack of funding - would take a huge pounding.

The fleet had reached the Luzon Strait after five days of sailing and a storm was waiting for them. They had expected 30 knots of wind but were facing closer to 40 and in unison the fleet headed for the coast of the Philippines, where they would be sheltered from the worst of the wind and the waves. At some point they would need to move into the open water and set a course for China that would expose the boats to the full brunt of the storm.

"I think everyone in the fleet would have been worried," said Ericsson 4 navigator Jules Salter. "Those conditions were awful."

A few teams stepped out but returned inshore with reports of eight-metre waves and 58-knot gusts - a wind strength that would qualify as a small hurricane on some scales. An email discussion started with some skippers debating the merits in abandoning the leg, but before it could finish PUMA was on their way to a port with a smashed boom. They were soon followed by Delta Lloyd, whose mainsail had been shredded and their steering gear damaged. Green Dragon then came off a wave and cracked part of her hull structure. It was carnage.

Four boats remained on the track and faced a decision: stay and wait or head out and make huge gains at a huge risk. Bekking took the plunge. On Ericsson 4, media crewmember Guy Salter described the move as “either a stroke of leg-winning genius or complete stupidity”.

Bekking wrote: “Our families were more concerned about us than I was. They must have thought (again) we are crazy. In this storm I preferred to be away from the coast so that if something happened we’d have space to manoeuvre. Also when it becomes too windy you can always decide to take all the sails down and float like a cork on the waves without having to worry about running aground.”

Bekking’s team was able to keep control and use their hefty lead to win what most agreed was the hardest leg they had ever sailed.

Blue had been followed into the Strait by Black, but the risk of the move was illustrated by the hole Echavarri’s boat picked up in their hull. They were taking on water and headed for land, only returning in leg six, while Delta Lloyd, back on the water, also suffered serious hull damage. They too would rejoin the fleet in Brazil. Ericsson 3 appeared to be heading for a similarly lengthy lay-off when they damaged their hull in big seas, but, after a repairs in Taiwan, they returned to the water and heroically finished the leg several hours after the fleet had set sail for Rio.

PUMA claimed second in the leg, but it wasn’t just their boat that had suffered - Ken Read had caught a finger in a pulley and had the top of it ripped off. Ericsson 4, meanwhile, survived in third and a patched up Green Dragon were fourth.

Leg 5 - Qingdao to Rio

Qingdao to Rio de Janeiro; China to Brazil; northern to southern hemisphere; winter to summer; crossing the Pacific north to south and east to west; 12,300 miles; two scoring gates. Leg five was longer than any previous leg and it was expected to take up to 40 days.

Once again, Ericsson 4 rocked up in confident mood having won the Qingdao in-port race from Blue, and their leaderboard position had been strengthened further by Bekking’s decision to change his rudders for a bigger set, thus improving their downwind performance but costing three points. This left Ericsson 4 seven points clear at the top, while Blue held a one-point margin over PUMA.

With Ericsson 3 still a few hours away finishing leg four – and Delta Lloyd and Telefonica Black on cargo ships to Brazil – there were just four boats on the start line but only three

would cross on time. Bekking had hit an uncharted rock moments before the start and returned to the dock to get fixed, eventually starting 19 hours late. Meanwhile, Ericsson 3 finally completed leg four before pit-stopping in Qingdao for two hours to load gear and new crew. Ericsson 3 started with a seven-hour deficit.

The fleet blasted south and after seven days of reaching conditions Ericsson 3 and Telefonica Blue had both caught and passed Green Dragon. Ericsson 4 led the fleet into what was a short and relatively painless third battle with the Doldrums before a one-week match race began between the leaders as they headed for Fiji and then to the scoring gate at 36 degrees south.

Ericsson 4 crossed first after nearly three weeks at sea, leading from Ericsson 3 who, incredibly, was 10 minutes clear of PUMA despite their late start. Equally extraordinary was the recovery of Telefonica Blue, who beat Green Dragon for fourth and was right in the race. Indeed, by day 20 the leaderboard showed Bekking to be in the lead as his boat took the most southerly course in the Southern Ocean. "Very proud of the guys," Bekking said.

A day earlier, however, Ericsson 3 had made the call that would win them the leg. Magnus Olsson had taken charge of the crew in Singapore after Lewander picked up an injury and had been given permanent control in China. Now, he was instructing his young navigator Aksel Magdahl to express himself. He did. Counter-intuitively, Ericsson 3 crossed the scoring gate and tacked to go back north-east. The problem he saw in the south was a huge area of high pressure, blocking the conventional route into the strong westerly breezes of the Southern Ocean. Only a few hours passed before everyone else accepted Magdahl's analysis that the conventional route wouldn't work. The real key to Magdahl's plan was a low pressure system spinning up to the north-east. Ericsson 3 hit the centre of the low on the afternoon of March 6 and quickly broke through into the strong northerly wind on the other side.

By the following morning it was clear that Ericsson 3 pulled off a brilliant coup and they never looked like losing their lead over the next 6,000 miles. Blue was the most southerly team, and the problems compounded when their forestay broke. "That was the worst moment of my race," Bekking would later say. "Two wins in a row and a great comeback. Then that happens. It felt at times like someone had a voodoo doll and kept sticking pins in it."

More breakages and tribulations would occur as the boats sailed the remaining 6,000 of the leg – a distance which, in its own right would count as a long leg – but the winning move had been played. Blue limped to Brazil – a long slog at reduced speed – and was passed in the race for overall honours by PUMA, who finished third behind Ericsson 4.

Leg 6 - Rio to Boston

Bekking was saying the right things as his crew stepped ashore in Rio, claiming that his team were not out of it yet. But the calamities of leg five had hurt and his team needed to hit back. They did just that in the Rio in-port race, excelling in the light airs to hold off PUMA. Delta Lloyd got the shock result of the race by taking third on their return, while Graef, on his home waters, finished a disappointing fourth. "Very bad result," he fumed afterwards, but with a 9.5-point lead over PUMA, and a further two on Blue, he appeared comfortable.

Less comfortable would be the ride to Boston. Michael Pammenter was evacuated off Telefonica Black with an ankle injury within hours of the start, while the coastal breezes wreaked havoc on the leaderboard. Ultimately it was Blue, on a mission to land a third leg win, that made best sense of the weather and pulled away in the light breezes their boat revels in.

Indeed, Blue led the fleet for 12 of the 15 days of this leg. At one point, the lead which they snatched just 10 hours into the leg had ballooned as high as 108 miles as they crossed the scoring gate first. But from April 20 to April 23, the fleet began to reel in the Blue boat. On April 23, with Ericsson 4 now just six miles behind, the call was made to gybe to the west. It was a decision Bekking had been fretting over for more than 24 hours. "A very tricky call has to be made," he wrote on April 22. "You gybe too early and you run out of pressure. You gybe too late and you end up sailing a bad angle. This will be the race call."

In the event, Bekking and navigator Tom Addis erred on the early side, cloaking their move under the cover of a 12-hour StealthPlay. But the move backfired. When they reappeared to the rest of the fleet, they were in third place. Three hours later, when Ericsson 4 emerged from their own StealthPlay, Blue had fallen to fourth, nearly 55 miles behind the new leader and second-placed Ericsson 3.

The hometown heroes on PUMA were now in third, but couldn't hold on all the way to the finish. Bekking and his men clawed back one place on the final night at sea and were just minutes behind Ericsson 3 at the finish. With Read in fourth place, Telefonica Black survived a collision with a whale to take fifth, while Delta Lloyd were sixth – they had managed a brilliant third place at the scoring gate – and Green Dragon was seventh.

"Any hope we had of winning this race has gone now," said Blue's Jono Swain on the dock. His side had climbed above PUMA in the standings but Graef was a dot on the horizon. "Ericsson 4 is too good and we are not consistent enough."

Leg 7 - Boston to Galway

The 2,550-mile transatlantic crossing was billed as a collision course and it nearly lived up to the hype as a huge ship charged towards the fleet shortly after the start. The main threats that had been identified were lobster pots, icebergs, whales and debris. Added to the big breezes and huge seas of the Atlantic, Bekking needed no reminding of the dangers as he took on a crossing that claimed his yacht three years earlier. But movistar seemed miles from his mind as he charged out of Boston and into an early lead.

His crew had already partially erased the disappointment of leg six by claiming yet another in-port race win – making them the most successful short-course team in the fleet – and their start to leg seven was also impressive. They reached the scoring gate at 52 degrees west in first place, edging PUMA by less than a minute after four days of sailing, before turning their attentions to the finish line and the days of heavy downwind running that lay ahead. Despite changes that both Telefonica yachts had made in this department, neither was expected to live with Ericsson in those conditions. “We have closed the gap on them, but they are far more comfortable in that breeze than us,” said Bekking.

True to form, Graef surged to the front at the halfway stage and, barring one slip to fourth on day six, Ericsson 4 was never out of the top two before claiming their fourth leg win.

Life was very different on PUMA. They lost one of their rudders in heavy seas two days before the finish and bowman Casey Smith pulled off an amazing mid-ocean replacement, caught on camera by media crewmember Rick Deppe. It sent them plummeting down the leaderboard to fifth, but, incredibly, they fought on to edge Green Dragon and pinch second. “This is as good as it gets,” said skipper Kenny Read. “That was some of the best sailing we’ve ever done in our whole lives. To come back after breaking the rudder like that. This crew is unbelievable. It’s almost like we thrive on adversity.”

Irish-Chinese entry Green Dragon, meanwhile, stole the show. In the middle of the night more than 3,000 people crowded the docks to see them record their best offshore finish. “This whole campaign was made for Galway,” skipper Ian Walker said. “It was all about coming here and we’ve picked up a result. We so desperately wanted to get on the podium and we have.

“I’m lost for words. I’m flabbergasted. The number of people, the number of boats. All at four in the morning. Given our recent run, third place was beyond our expectations, but that is what we strive for.”

Blue could only manage fourth and was now 14.5 points adrift of Ericsson 4. But their attention by now was on PUMA, 1.5 points back. Their race was for second.

Ericsson 3, meanwhile, finished last after a collision with a whale two days in damaged their keel and cost 10% of their speed. It was a cruel end to their run of form.

Leg 8 - Galway to Marstrand

It may have been one of the shorter legs of the race, but it was long on intensity. The 1,250-mile journey started with a furious downwind blast out of Galway in more than 20 knots before the fleet headed south down the west coast of Ireland, passed inside the Fastnet Rock and then across the English Channel. The running conditions were what these boats were built for, but Ericsson 4 suffered an awful gybe and followed it with another wipe-out, smashing a steering wheel into eight pieces and opening a crack between the cockpit floor and the hull. It was a problem but they raced on.

The order of the fleet changed regularly because of quirks of coastal weather and tides – Green Dragon and Telefonica Black were the unlikely leaders at one stage - but the real excitement started once the fleet emerged from the English Channel and into the North Sea. PUMA had come into the leg buoyed by winning the Galway in-port race – their first win of any description in the race – but they had struggled to find a rhythm in this leg. The battle for second was in the balance and they appeared to surrender it when they “blew up” one of their spinnakers soon after the Hook of Holland and were forced into a more westerly position by not having the sail required to sail the same angle as the fleet. They soon tumbled to the nether regions of the leaderboard.

However, just as Bekking profited in adversity on leg two when their broken daggerboard forced them into an area with favourable winds, so PUMA got lucky here as stronger breezes came astern. It carried Read's yacht into third place and then second as he overtook Green Dragon off the tip of Denmark. The margin was less than a minute as Read stole second for the leg and second overall owing to Bekking's fourth-placed finish.

"The 'no-quit' in this team is beyond imagination," said skipper Ken Read, dockside in Marstrand. "We had every reason to quit and I think we're kind of stunned to be honest. Twenty-four hours ago we were sailing with a triple reef and a number four jib, upwind in a gale, while the other guys were running down the coast.

"I almost feel bad a little bit for Green Dragon," Read added. "They sailed a great race. They were right at the front pretty much the whole time. That's their best effort yet. We got them going around the corner at the end. We had a little pace on them in reaching conditions and we just got by them."

Not surprisingly Ericsson 4 had won their fifth leg of the race – their third in succession – and the margin stood at 15 points with just 20 left to play for from the two remaining legs

and one in-port race. "We're very close to winning the race," admitted Grael. "But we're not there yet. A lot can happen in yacht racing and you should not take anything for granted."

His point would be underlined in galling style by one of his main rivals at the start of the penultimate leg.

Leg 9 - Marstrand to Stockholm

The scene was set for a thrilling battle between PUMA and Blue, with just one point splitting the two ahead of the 525-mile sprint down the coast. But then it all went calamitously wrong for Bekking.

His team had made an excellent start, leading the fleet out of Marstrand when Simon Fisher, who had been recalled as navigator, gave Bekking a course heading of 180 degrees which, he believed, would see them narrowly pass a rock. He then put down his portable chart to help move the sail stack. In the 30 seconds that the chart was out of view Blue's race was lost. They hit the rock at 15 knots and the crash sent a daggerboard cutting through the hull, while the keel became lodged on the rock. For the next few hours the crew battled to plug the hole in the hull, while the local coast guard, emergency services and the PUMA shore crew helped pull Blue free. They headed for port where they stayed making repairs until long after the rest of the fleet had finished.

"We know we had an absolute shocker and have given a podium place away," Bekking said. "On a personal note, this was the leg I had been looking so much forward to, sailing through the home waters, going around a lot of corners, a leg which suited us well on paper, but the opposite happened."

To make life harder on Bekking, PUMA had taken the lead followed narrowly by Ericsson 3. Inside the final few miles a mistake by PUMA allowed the Nordic crew to move from half a mile behind into the slenderest of leads. What followed was one of the great race finishes, PUMA initiating a fierce tacking duel as they approached the Sandham finish line. Ericsson 3 had been a revelation offshore but repeatedly under-performed in the in-port races and their close combat skills let them down again here. Snagging their jib on the radar dome with just a few hundred yards to go, Ericsson 3 gave up the win and PUMA took a leg for the first time.

"We're not the bridesmaids any more!" Read said at dockside. "These short races are almost harder than the long races. You just don't get any sleep at all. It feels very, very,

very, very, very good. It's a relief. It's been frustrating always being the bridesmaid but you know what, better late than never."

The result virtually assured Blue's demise to third on the final podium, but there was also the matter of the overall winner. Ericsson 4 finished third on the leg and made their win of the 10th edition of this race a mathematical certainty. "It couldn't be any better," said Graef. "We have a wonderful crew. A lot of experience. They have been fantastic on the whole leg, the whole race around the world. It's a pleasure to sail with them."

"Preparation, that's what it comes down to," said Ericsson watch leader Stu Banatynne, who, along with crew-mate Brad Jackson, had levelled Mark Christensen's record of three race wins. "Ericsson committed very early to doing this; we had good funding, got the right people, experienced people, and from there all the right decisions were made."

Leg 10 - Stockholm to St Petersburg

In a race of twists and turns, few were as spectacular as what Blue achieved in Stockholm. Having arrived late after lengthy repairs to their mangled yacht, Bekking's crew took to the start line of the final in-port race and, once again, blitzed the opposition with an excellent tactical display. "My guys never give up and that's what I'm proudest of," Bekking said. "We have given away second place but our pride has won us this in-port race."

His mood was lifted further as Telefonica Black rounded off the campaign in brilliant fashion. In keeping with the overall theme of the 2008-09 race, the competition over the final leg was tight and the finish even tighter. In an absorbing tacking duel for the line, Black held off PUMA by a couple of boat lengths to grab their first leg win of the campaign.

Blue took the remaining podium place and Ericsson 3 was fourth, just ahead of the sister ship Ericsson 4, while Green Dragon held off a hard-charging Delta Lloyd to finish sixth.

On the arrivals' dock, Telefonica Black skipper Fernando Echavarri's body language said it all. His head was in his hands. He looked shattered. "So hard," he said. The duel with PUMA went on for the better part of 40 miles, sleep countable in minutes. "Nothing is easy."

He and the crew on Telefonica Black had surpassed their greatest expectations. But, the toe-to-toe intensity of 400 miles of coastal racing, combined with nine months of brutal



living, left them drained. "It's a prize for all of the crew," Echavarri said. "We have been trying to do it in all the legs but couldn't. This was our last chance. We are really happy. It is a great way to finish the Volvo Ocean Race. I am really proud of everyone in the group. They have done an excellent job."

"Hats off to Telefonica Black," said Ken Read. "Congratulations to all those guys, they have worked very hard for their first leg win. We will take our second place and our second overall. The big picture is we finished this race, everyone is safe, the boat has been spectacular. We have everything to be proud of."

Bekking was more reflective. "When you put two or three years into a campaign, it's always a little bit sad at the end," he said. "We wanted first and then second but it hasn't worked out. That's yacht racing. Weird things happen. But I am so proud of everyone in this team. They never stopped fighting."

Ericsson 4's Torben Grael added: "Some of these guys you had never met before and you become like brothers. Now we go our own ways and it's a strange feeling. It was a very long race around the world. We are completely drained and tired so I think everyone is looking forward to a nice rest."

Race Eleven: 2011-12

Alicante – Cape Town – Abu Dhabi – Sanya – Auckland – Itajaí – Miami – Lisbon – Lorient – Galway

Distance: 39,270

Winner: Ericsson 4



PUMA produced a commanding performance in the final battle of the Volvo Ocean Race 2011-12 to win the Discover Ireland In-Port Race and take the honours in the inshore series.

While Groupama sailing team were celebrating overall victory in the eight-month round-the-world race, they were denied what would have been a unique double as PUMA held on for the win they needed to win the inshore series.

PUMA Ocean Racing powered by BERG, wearing Ireland rugby shirts, scored six points for the win, taking their in-port total to 45 points and breaking their tie with CAMPER at the top of the inshore rankings.



CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand finished second to place second in the 10-race series with 44. Telefónica finished third, followed by Groupama, who finished third in the inshore series.

Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing finished fifth, Team Sanya sixth.

"Winning anything is fun, whether it's an in-port race or a game of checkers," PUMA skipper Ken Read said. "All these guys on this boat did an amazing job, we just finished an around the world race, a Volvo race."

CAMPER were first off the downwind start-line as the fleet split in two, with PUMA, Sanya and Groupama opting for a course on the port side of the Galway Bay.

Their lead was short lived as the north-northeast wind gusted stronger at about 12 knots on the port side of the course, with PUMA leading around the first mark.

Overall race winners Groupama were just 10 seconds behind in second place followed by CAMPER, Sanya, Telefónica and Abu Dhabi, who were forced to make a penalty turn for failing to keep clear of Sanya on the opening leg.

Groupama overshot the second mark to allow CAMPER to gain a position and jump to second place behind PUMA. Sanya held fourth, just ahead of Telefónica and Abu Dhabi.

Thousands of spectators on board hundreds of boats watched on as the fleet tussled for the final time on the 8.2 nautical mile inshore course. They weren't disappointed as Groupama clawed back CAMPER to claim second place at the fifth mark.

PUMA continued to power and proved unbeatable, while Groupama and CAMPER fought tooth and nail to the end.

Leg 1 - Alicante to Cape Town

A test of resolve on the water, a logistical nightmare on shore -- Leg 1 turned into two distinct races for a fleet ravaged by bad weather and worse luck.

Team Telefónica are the new front-runners in the Volvo Ocean Race 2011-12 after scoring a commanding victory in the first of nine offshore legs.

CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand pushed them hard over the closing days but



even the best 24-hour run of the leg could not get them close, while Groupama sailing team's offshore debut saw them finish third, three days behind the winners.

There was drama aplenty during the racing but nothing compared to the tales of those forced out during the 6,500 nautical mile first leg.

The 2011 start was reminiscent of the debut of the Volvo Open 70s just six years ago.

Then, the opening night saw the fleet lashed by a storm that resulted in the retirement of former race-winner Paul Cayard's Pirates of the Caribbean, resulting in them having to be airlifted to Cape Town.

The winners of the leg were Mike Sanderson's ABN AMRO ONE, who had finished last in the opening in-port race.

Telefónica were in the same situation, having finished rock bottom in the Iberdrola In-Port Race in Alicante. Like Sanderson, Iker Martínez was able to inspire a great comeback to take full marks in Leg 1.

"For me it's a great feeling," said Martínez. "It's the first regatta I've sailed as skipper and it's a big responsibility. Everything has gone well and we have a great machine. It's run smoothly and quickly and that's down to the enormous amount of work the team has put in."

Sanderson was less fortunate this time around. Not even 24 hours after the start, Team Sanya were forced to retire from the leg with massive issues in the bow section of their second-generation Volvo 70 sustained in heavy seas off Spain's Mediterranean coast.

Ian Walker's Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing team had already dismasted by then and though the team briefly got back in the Leg 1 running they reluctantly decided they would be better working on their rigging and shipping the boat on.

Incredibly, the queue to find suitable shipping options to Cape Town would only get longer as the leg progressed.

Once out of the Mediterranean, the survival contest turned to more traditional competition and an open ocean race southwards.

A high of the meteorological kind took over, the first of several to act as governors for this leg.

Gone were the usual trade winds north of the equator, blocked from forming by a low-pressure system further north west. Navigators pondered the GRIB files but were faced with a dilemma.

Shortly after the fleet cleared the Strait of Gibraltar they had to choose between heading west into an area of light and shifty headwinds in search of the trades or instead diving south along the West African coast, also in light conditions, but pointing almost directly at the course turning mark at Fernando de Noronha off the coast of Brazil.

The outcome of the decision would be the key to the entire leg.

Franck Cammas and Groupama 4 opted for the African option but in doing so, sailed away from the fleet and into different weather. Once committed, there would be no turning back.

Ken Read on PUMA Ocean Racing powered by BERG led into the west, closely shadowed by Martínez and his Telefónica team.

Hesitation by Chris Nicholson's CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand over which side to cover while sailing around the windless centre of high pressure near the Canaries would prove costly.

"Although we make these things as a group decision, I feel that the responsibility is mine for the fact that at the time, I initially promoted that the easterly option was still on," said CAMPER navigator Will Oxley.

A week later, the outcome was clear. Those in the west gained and the well-worn sailing cliché of the 'rich get richer' was being wheeled out in regular parlance.

Read had edged into the lead but had been lured into a match-race with Martínez while Nicholson paced 150 miles astern and Cammas could only hope for a passing-lane opportunity as the leg progressed.

Officially around 15 miles apart, the two leaders were effectively in a dead heat until within days of passing Fernando de Noronha, the Spanish crew rolled the Americans who had been snared by a patch of light wind. Read admitted the following day: "We had our butts handed to us."

On Monday, November 21, the Newport, Rhode Island native had bigger issues to worry about as PUMA's Mar Mostro dismasted in conditions that were far from extreme.

With PUMA out of the running for the first leg, the stage was set for the closing act. All

hope of the running-order being over-turned rested on the St. Helena high-pressure system and whether or not a passing cold front along its southern border could offer a sleigh-ride to Cape Town and perhaps deliver a passing-lane along the way.

Telefónica's 100-mile lead over CAMPER and a partial ride on a cold front, however, enabled them to ride out the rest of the leg into Cape Town where 40 knots of wind delivered a tempestuous finale for the leg winners who arrived on Saturday, 26 November 2011.

Telefónica lead the standings with 31 points, followed by CAMPER on 29 and Groupama on 22 and all three are in good condition.

As for the others, Abu Dhabi and Sanya welcomed their boats to Cape Town off container ships on November 30 and after days of no-stop work hope to be back sailing by December 7 – just three days before the second in-port race.

PUMA face a huge task to reach Cape Town, step a new mast and be ready in time.

The boat and crew remain for the moment in Tristan da Cunha, the most remote settlement on earth, in the middle of nautical nowhere, as one commentator put it.

Ken Read's crew are waiting to be collected by ship, with the best they can hope for being to arrive in Cape Town some time on Monday evening.

The team can do a lot of preparation en route but they will be up against the clock to be ready for the Cape Town In-Port Race on December 10 and the start of a second leg that has seen the plans re-drawn because of the threat of piracy -- and that will be a whole other logistical story.

Leg 2 – Cape Town to Abu Dhabi

There was nothing straightforward about Leg 2 of the Volvo Ocean Race 2011-12, which was split into two in an unprecedented move to counter the threat of piracy in the Indian Ocean.

For Stage 1, the boats made their way to an undisclosed Safe Haven port in the Indian Ocean -- in 'stealth mode' for part of the way to keep its location secret. Once there, they were loaded onto a ship and transported to within 100 nautical miles of Abu Dhabi for a Stage 2 sprint to the race's first ever Middle Eastern stopover.

First place in Stage 1 and second in Stage 2 proved plenty to give Telefónica the overall Leg 2 victory and see them extend their advantage over CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand at the top of the leaderboard to eight points.

It might have all been so different, though, if a first stage that was heart-breaking for some and heart-stopping for fans had ended just slightly differently.

The teams left Cape Town on December 11 still expecting harsh weather conditions on the first night only to make a painfully slow crossing from the Atlantic to the Indian oceans.

"One week out from the start we said no matter what, we wouldn't be going north," said CAMPER skipper Chris Nicholson. "As we leave Cape Town and hug the coast it's always drive south, but no one got to drive south straight away. The best made plans have to be changed at times."

They would keep changing all the way to the final destination.

Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing, Groupama sailing team and CAMPER swapped the lead over the first few days before a definitive split in tactics saw Telefónica at the northern extreme of the fleet as Groupama drove ever further south in search of stronger breezes. "Franck Cammas just loves the Southern Ocean so much," was how Abu Dhabi skipper Ian Walker later put it.

By day six, progress was still frustratingly slow, with a weather system travelling just ahead of the main fleet and travelling at about the same speed -- meaning an exit to faster speeds stayed tantalisingly out of reach.

Desperate times calls for desperate measures, and while Groupama continued south east, not getting any closer to the finishing line but starting to feel a lot better about the decision, Team Sanya took a bold option to head north.

Mike Sanderson's team made it through some lively weather unscathed and began building a lead that stretched up to 213 nautical miles -- not bad for the only team in a second-hand boat -- before reporting damage to a piece of rigging on day nine.

It was a cruel blow for the Chinese team, who had been forced out of Leg 1 inside the first 24 hours after suffering massive damage to their hull.

This time, they were forced to head to Madagascar for repairs and would go on to miss

the transport ship to the northern Emirates. "Lowest of lows," described Watch Captain Richard Mason as he prepared a jury rig for the broken D2.

By the following day, Groupama's gamble had taken them into a lead they held all the way to their entry into the Doldrums on December 22, covering 478.28 nm over one day-long period along the way to take the provisional Leg 2 honours in the IWC Schaffhausen Speed Record Challenge.

By then, the fleet was in Stealth Mode but nothing could mask the problems Groupama were about to face, as their lead was swallowed up by a zone of infamous instability - the Doldrums.

With Groupama stuck like glue, Telefónica and CAMPER took the advantage to the east, with PUMA Ocean Racing powered by BERG behind them, and the top two took up a thrilling tussle that would continue over Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day (and take in some frankly shocking carol singing).

The stage victory was in doubt right up until the finish line at the secret loading port, with Telefónica crossing first with a winning margin of just one minute 57 seconds after 15 days and over 4,000 nm of sailing. Telefónica scooped 24 points, with CAMPER gaining 20, PUMA 16, Groupama 12 and Abu Dhabi eight.

Martínez described the run in as "final miles of madness" and a game of cat and mouse, with the pair switching the lead repeatedly.

In a move unprecedented in the 38-year history of the event, the fleet was safely loaded onto a ship, arriving at Sharjah on January 2.

There was a scare for Groupama on the eve of stage 2, with the sailing team having to fix a gash in the hull, but they made light of the trouble to win a seven-hour sprint race in much faster conditions than expected, overhauling Telefónica with 10 miles to go for another exciting finish and the full six points.

Telefónica took five points for second, CAMPER came in third for four points, followed by PUMA (three) and Abu Dhabi (two), with a firework reception greeting the home team on their way in.

Leg 3 - Abu Dhabi to Sanya

A leg that ultimately produced a familiar result was anything but run of the mill, as the teams came through a punishing one-day stage, more heart-stopping moments with the



boats in the air and an offshore battle that was as testing as it gets.

Telefónica's latest triumph came after a deflating finish for them to the first stage sprint to Sharjah. That was back on January 14 when the five teams that made it to Abu Dhabi enjoyed an almighty tussle for the first 20 percent of the points for Leg 3.

Telefónica led for much of the 106 nm race up the coast only for Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing to snatch an unexpected victory in the pitch black night. PUMA Ocean Racing powered by BERG followed them across with Groupama sailing team finishing third and Telefónica having to settle for fourth, above only CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand.

As in Leg 2, the boats were then loaded on to a container ship to take them through waters affected by piracy. The secret safe haven port was revealed to be Male in the Maldives from where the six teams set off on the 3,051 nm stage to Sanya on January 22.

Telefónica troubles

The first day brought more troubles for Telefónica when a fitting on the huge code zero sail broke. PUMA's Mar Mostro took the lead on the first night but nothing would be even close to decided until the teams made it through the feared Malacca Strait.

CAMPER moved first in time for skipper Chris Nicholson to celebrate Australia Day on January 26 but Telefónica were by then the most northerly boat and they snatched top spot before the entrance to the Strait.

PUMA suffered damage to a dagger board after a collision with a tree trunk and then got snared by a fishing net but the biggest problem faced by the fleet was sleep deprivation with wind shifts and tidal surges making it a roll of the dice every minute.

The lead changed hands again and again between Telefónica, Groupama and PUMA, with just 300 metres separating the leading three on the morning of January 29 while slightly further back a bat took up residence on Abu Dhabi's Azzam.

Telefónica led the fleet into the South China Sea and a final 1,000 nm of tough upwind sailing.

Failed gamble

On February 1, PUMA surprised everyone by making a bold move east that ultimately

failed while the following day the top four said 'Good morning, Vietnam'.

Groupama hopes of depriving Telefónica of victory took a blow when they hit a floating object before snapping a mainsheet in a night of drama.

They carried out quick repairs but could not quite squeeze out enough boat speed to overtake Telefónica who sealed victory on Saturday, February 4 followed by Groupama, CAMPER, PUMA and Abu Dhabi with all of them welcomed by thousands of fans.

There were thousands more on Sunday to greet Sanya as they came in sixth out of six but ecstatic to sail into a stopover under racing conditions for the first time in the race.

Leg 4 - Sanya to Auckland

A delayed start, an epic finish and a pitiless upwind pounding along the way. Leg 4 of the Volvo Ocean Race 2011-12 was a bruising one for the sailors but for the fans who welcomed the boats into Auckland, and for everyone connected to Groupama sailing team, it will live long in the memory.

Groupama survived a terrible late scare on their way to victory, with bow damage on the way in prompting Media Crew Member Yann Riou to write memorably, "If we don't sink, we win!" They were followed home the following day by PUMA, who surged in for second place, and Telefónica, who just managed to fend off an attack from local favourites CAMPER to claim the final podium place, as hundreds of spectator boats welcomed them in.

Franck Cammas's first taste of victory in the race came after they finished third in the short Stage 1 race, devised by race management to keep the fleet out of the worst of some appalling conditions -- with waves like liquid mountain ranges, according to Race CEO Knut Frostad -- on the way out of Sanya in southern China.

Stage 2 was billed as 5,220 nautical miles but by the time Groupama had crossed the line after more than 19 days at sea they had sailed much further, with all the crews having to head a long way north before they could even think about going south after finally leaving the clutches of the South China Sea.

Despite the delayed start, conditions were still extremely demanding coming out of Sanya, with upwind slamming the norm for the first few days.

After starting behind everyone else, PUMA gambled all with what they called their



boomerang strategy -- a bid to go up and round the fleet. It worked up to a point, reviving their hopes in what might have been another lost leg, but it was Groupama who took control as they moved into a strong easterly position on day seven.

As speeds rocketed in classic trade winds conditions, it became more and more about a battle for second place.

CAMPER hopes of taking that honour suffered a devastating blow when they tore their vital J2 headsail, losing 60 miles to Groupama in the process.

Groupama led across the equator before the fleet split down the middle crossing the sparsely populated Solomon Islands, with Telefónica, CAMPER and Sanya choosing to go west.

Telefónica's speedy passage through the Solomons re-established them as a threat to the podium places but it was becoming increasingly clear that Groupama, sailing flawlessly according to their rivals, were not about to be caught.

PUMA dropped to third, and looked to be struggling to hold on to that position as a series of windless clouds slowed Ken Read's team, causing them to lose 30 miles and cede second spot to Telefónica.

The three boats behind Groupama stayed neck and neck all the way through to the finish, as behind them Abu Dhabi and Sanya close the gap significantly.

Sanya, stranded 393 nm off the pace on day 17, were within 30 nm of PUMA by the final morning -- not quite close enough to challenge for a podium place but satisfied to have been part of a terrific scrap.

Leg 5 - Auckland to Itajaí

Was this the toughest leg in the history of the Volvo Ocean Race?

With only one of the six boats making it all the way from Auckland in New Zealand to Itajaí in Brazil without having to stop for repairs -- or worse -- it qualifies in terms of attrition and the video showing Telefónica sailors being blown horizontal by a massive wave will leave an indelible mark on the race.

But there was more to this leg than a struggle for survival. To win the leg, Ken Read's PUMA Ocean Racing powered by BERG not only had to avoid the breakages that devastated the fleet but then withstand a heroic recovery from Team Telefónica, who

came back from the brink to give their rivals a mighty fright and eventually clinch a second place that strengthened their grip on the overall standings.

Leg 5 was always tipped to be the biggest challenge of the race and it lived up to its billing right from the start, as the fleet encountered brutal first night conditions with massive waves and head winds up to 40 knots. Within hours of Team Sanya leading the fleet out of Auckland, Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing were forced to turn back for repairs to one of their bow bulkheads. As Ian Walker's crew scrambled to get back in the race the remaining five boats led by Team Telefónica headed towards an intense tropical depression north east of New Zealand.

CAMPER co-skipper Stuart Bannatyne, competing in his sixth edition, said: "Without a shadow of a doubt, that was one of the hardest opening nights of a Volvo leg I have ever done."

After blasting their way south east towards the Roaring Forties the fleet got a brief respite on the third day when they crossed a high pressure system bringing lighter winds. Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi's shore crew had worked round the clock to repair their damage only for the Emirati team to have to shelter from a 60 knot storm before resuming racing.

On PUMA, injuries to Casey Smith and Thomas Johanson made skipper Ken Read consider a diversion to the Chatham Islands to evacuate the casualties but after telephone consultations with medical advisers ashore Johanson's dislocated shoulder was successfully put back in place by Jono Swain, while Smith was confined to his bunk on a regime of painkillers. Both sailors ultimately made good recoveries.

Team Sanya briefly took the leg lead before breaking their windward rudder and spinning into a horrific crash gybe which pinned the boat flat at night time on Day 5. After a full assessment of the damage the next day, skipper Mike Sanderson made the heart breaking decision to suspend racing and turn back to New Zealand for repairs. Arriving in Tauranga five days later Sanya committed to making a return to the race by the Miami stopover.

Meanwhile CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand built a 50 nm lead over chasing Groupama sailing team and PUMA as the conditions became increasingly extreme, forcing the teams into survival rather than racing mode as they tore past the 800 nm long exclusion zone put in place by the race organisers to keep the boats safe from the risk of icebergs. The breakneck conditions continued throughout the sixth day with all four remaining boats turning in 24-hour runs over 500 nm.

After two perilous nosedives in succession CAMPER skipper Chris Nicholson

commented: "If we can get through this unscathed we will get ashore and think this was the best time we ever had. But right now at this moment in time I have to call it quite a stressful situation. Then with just under 5,000 nautical miles to go, leaders CAMPER were forced to throttle back to try to repair damage to their bow sustained by launching off the up to 10 metre seas. The following day, running short of materials to carry out a full repair and after consulting with the boat's design team, Nicholson's crew were forced to head for Puerto Montt in Chile 2,500 nm away to rendezvous with their shore crew for a repair pit stop.

Worsening conditions over the next few days saw the leading trio face freezing air temperatures, massive waves and winds gusting up over 50 knots. Third placed Telefónica were forced to slow dramatically to prevent bow damage sustained earlier in the leg from worsening. As Abu Dhabi finally got some solid breeze after being trapped in a high pressure system 1400 nm behind the leaders Telefónica confirmed their intention to stop for repairs after rounding Cape Horn.

Groupama and PUMA rounded Cape horn just an hour and a half apart and turned north for Itajaí. Abu Dhabi, now 1400 miles behind had been sailing at peak speeds over 40 knots but then had to slow to just 5 knots when the crew discovered damage to the side of the boat. After sailing cautiously to assess the damage Ian Walker's crew carried out a heroic repair on the water repair which involved bowman Justin Slattery being lowered over the side to drill through the boat's hull and insert more than 30 bolts to bind the inner and outer skins together.

Telefónica stopped in the Cabo de Hornos National Park to meet their shore crew for 17 hours of repairs allowing bowman Antonio Cuervas-Mons, Ñeti, to leave the boat after sustaining a back injury. Telefónica resumed racing on April 1 with a seemingly impossible 412 nm deficit to the leaders. However as PUMA and Groupama engaged in an intense match race for the lead just six nm apart Telefónica began a spectacular comeback. Aided by favourable winds clocking up 415 nm in 24 hours and continuing their charge at every position report.

By Day 17 Telefónica had closed to within 100 nm of Groupama and PUMA, who had been trading the lead by the hour with just over 800 nm to go in strong headwinds and a confused seaway.

The following day Groupama were put out of contention when their mast broke above the first spreader when they were leading PUMA by two miles. The devastated French crew quickly re-grouped and headed for Punta del Este in Uruguay to set up a jury rig as CAMPER began repairs in Chile and Abu Dhabi make the decision to also head to Puerto Montt ahead of shipping their boat to Brazil.

That set the scene for the thrilling denouement, with Telefónica sailing further offshore in stronger breeze and hauling in PUMA until they were within one nautical mile of the leaders.

Spectator boats came out to greet the two rivals on the final stretch up the coast in brilliant sunshine on Friday, with most of the locals urging on Telefónica and their Brazilian crew member Joca Signorini.

It was not quite to be, as the wind, while light, remained relatively stable, leaving Telefónica no opportunity to get past.

PUMA held on for victory and 30 points, completing a glorious comeback of their own following their dismasting in Leg 1 and lifting them temporarily at least to second place on the leaderboard.

Groupama's ingenious jury rig saw them safely home in third and CAMPER eventually followed them home in fourth, arriving 31 days after their departure from Auckland and 10 days after the winners.

Leg 6 - Itajaí to Miami

Ahead on the leaderboard, behind on the water - the 'mirror image' finishing positions of the main challengers on Leg 6 mean the Volvo Ocean race 2011-12 is impossibly tight with three offshore legs and four in-port races to go.

Almost exactly 17 days after they led coming out of Itajaí in Brazil, PUMA Ocean Racing powered by BERG beat a thunderstorm on the way into Miami by a hair's breadth to make it back-to-back leg wins and take 30 points for first place.

An hour later, CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand arrived with the foul weather to claim 25 points for second, before Groupama sailing team won their match race with overall leaders Team Telefónica for third, picking up 20 points to 15 for the Spanish leaders. The next morning, Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing arrived in the moonlight for fifth and 10 points, while Team Sanya, unable to take the start, were putting the finishing touches to repairs in Savannah, Georgia and preparing to sail to Miami.

It was the first time Telefónica had failed to finish on the podium in an offshore leg and made their record-equalling three straight legs wins at the start of the race feel just that little more distant.

The combined effect was to leave the top four teams separated by just 17 points -- with Telefónica now leading on 164 points, followed by Groupama on 153, CAMPER on 149 and PUMA on 147.

PUMA led from the start, enjoying the psychological advantage of leading the fleet around the short inshore course and out into the Atlantic.

After an initial 'bubble bath' or around 20 knots for the first few hours, conditions settled on the first night to produce fast reaching conditions in flat seas and warm water as the fleet reached up the Brazilian coast.

"Oh my God, what a relief," was the reaction of PUMA skipper Ken Read. "What an incredibly welcome relief and a nice night of sailing it has been."

By the evening of Day 2, the fast reaching conditions had been replaced by lighter southeasterly airs and the fleet split. Going northwest were CAMPER and Abu Dhabi, PUMA took the middle road, while out to the east were Telefónica and Groupama with a lateral separation of 37 nautical miles from the leader boat CAMPER. PUMA were third.

On Day 4 PUMA took the lead from CAMPER and Abu Dhabi, sailing two knots faster. CAMPER took over once again as the fleet picked their way across a cold front, a 50-mile wide area of storms that produced a 180-degree wind shift. The fleet tacked back and forth under the clouds, led by CAMPER with Abu Dhabi just 0.4 nm astern. PUMA was a solid third, 1.9 nm behind.

After becoming becalmed overnight, PUMA led the way out into the fresh new breeze at 0400 GMT on Day 5, with a margin of 13.6 nm over CAMPER with Abu Dhabi in third. The boats made their way north towards the eastern tip of Brazil, with 55 nm separating PUMA in first to Groupama in last place. At 1900 GMT, Telefónica replaced Abu Dhabi as CAMPER's sparring partner. Groupama were struggling 75 nm astern, mystified why the boat was lacking performance.

The wind died overnight on Day 7, causing considerable compression, but the crews were anything but complacent. Telefónica briefly snatched second place, but by 0700 GMT CAMPER were back in the reserve slot. Groupama were now 104.30 nm behind. PUMA moved to within 17 nm of the beach, almost directly off the turning point at Recife, covering their position to ensure that no one pulled off a risky attempt at cutting inside and scything miles of the trip.

PUMA passed the Cabo Branco waypoint on the northeast tip of Brazil the following day

to lead the way north towards the Equator. The race to the Doldrums at speeds of up to 18 knots was about pure boat speed, and the crews revelled in the trade wind conditions.

By Day 9, it was a marathon match race for second place, with PUMA led 25 nm ahead. Overnight and for several hours, CAMPER and Telefónica raced side-by-side, trading gybes and jibes, 150 nm off the coast of Brazil. From the front, Read said, "Sailing on a Volvo 70 doesn't get any easier than this."

PUMA crossed the Equator at 0840 for the fourth and final time during this race, and made sure to keep King Neptune happy with a drop of rum, after failing on Leg 1 to supply the King with the correct libations, something to which the crew attributed their subsequent dismasting. A big night was in store as the fleet took on the final Doldrums crossing.

The order was PUMA/CAMPER/Telefónica/Abu Dhabi/Groupama, the latter now 151.6 nm astern. "It doesn't feel good to be trailing the other boats, it's a completely new feeling" said Martin Stromberg.

On Day 10, black clouds nearly brought down PUMA. It was a long hard night for Ken Read and his men, who had to fight to stay in front. As CAMPER and Telefónica fought against black, wind-sucking clouds in the midst of the Doldrums, PUMA bled miles through the night, their lead of 30 nm eroded painfully to 6.3.

Day 11 dawned and speeds rose to 20 knots as the fleet enjoyed proper champagne sailing for the first time, making a quick passage towards the Windward Islands, and the following day told a similar story as PUMA matched CAMPER in a crazy, wet roller coaster ride as the fleet crashed north in the most exhilarating of sailing. But by Day 13, the breeze had softened, producing the threat of squalls and clouds. It was a tense time for leg leaders PUMA as they traversed a trough. The unstable conditions made PUMA very vulnerable as the leading trio approached the Caribbean island of Antigua.

Tactical decisions had to be made and the leading three all chose different options, leaving the game wide open. PUMA took the high road to the east, looking for a quick exit from the light wind trough. CAMPER, having rounded Barbuda, sailed much closer to the Virgin Islands in search of new breeze, while Telefónica was positioned between the two, with their options wide open. 20.2 nm separated PUMA in first, from Telefónica in third.

Day 14 was a drift off. Glassy conditions and low boat speeds greeted the fleet as they entered the final 1000 nm stretch to the finish. CAMPER took a small window of opportunity and shot through a relatively small and shallow gap between Anguilla and

Scrub Island, saving themselves five miles and the leading three compressed the lateral separation from over 100 nm on Day 13 to 25 on Day 14.

Day 15 was an island sprint, with PUMA 32.7 nm ahead of Telefónica who had moved into second. Ken Read and his men left the glass seas and found new breeze overnight midway between the Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands and extended their lead at average speeds of around 17 knots.

By May 7, Day 16, the weather gods had thrown in another band of light air. PUMA led from CAMPER and Telefónica while Groupama and Abu Dhabi were making steady gains and by 1600, Groupama had overhauled Telefónica to take third place. The French, with very little to lose, made a risky move and split round the Turks and Caicos Islands. Abu Dhabi went north and Groupama went south. The move paid off for Groupama.

With just one more tedious night at sea, PUMA led CAMPER by 11.3 nm on Day 17. Groupama in third were 55.20 behind, with Telefónica just 10 miles astern. Abu Dhabi were still over 100 nm in deficit and the leading trio raced towards the turning point at Eleuthera Island Light, 124 nm ahead.

PUMA's lead came under pressure on the final stretch but smart tactical work kept CAMPER at bay.

Leg 7 - Miami to Lisbon

The start of Leg 7 was dominated by one name, and one name only. Not Franck, Ken or Iker, but Alberto.

The first tropical storm of the 2012 hurricane season raised its ugly head just in time in early May, sitting several hundred miles north of the Miami start line.

Straight from the off Tropical Storm Alberto threw a curveball at the fleet, who were doing all they could to stay out of its way while picking up the beneficial Gulf Stream current running north up the coast.

A sudden change in direction caught the fleet by surprise and before long they were taking a 35-knot battering in huge seas.

Early leaders Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing and Team Telefónica could only watch as



Groupama executed a perfect gybe in the centre of the storm and raced 40 miles in front of the chasing pack.

The early jump placed Groupama well for the North Atlantic sleigh ride that was about to ensue, thanks to an easterly moving depression.

However, the weather system was travelling too fast for the frontrunners to hold on, and Groupama, along with Telefónica, slammed straight into light winds.

Behind them, CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand were the first to bail out of their position to the south of the fleet, heading north to find better breeze.

With the Gulf Stream still playing a massive role in the fortunes of the fleet, it was Abu Dhabi who emerged on top as they found themselves at the head of a front from the northwest.

Ian Walker's men pulled out an 80-mile lead, with Groupama and PUMA Ocean Racing powered by BERG picking up the chase.

The final hurdle was a band of light winds off the Portuguese coast, and as Abu Dhabi were in the lead, so they were the first to slow down, helpless as their rivals closed the gap.

As the leading teams approached the Tagus River, Groupama were within a mile of Abu Dhabi but the Emirati team held strong to notch up their first offshore leg win.

There were also celebrations for Groupama, whose second place finish propelled them into the overall lead with just two legs left.

PUMA took third, with Telefónica in fourth, CAMPER in fifth and Sanya in sixth.

With the top four teams split by just 21 points, the stage was set for the closest ever Volvo Ocean Race finish in its 39-year history.

Leg 8 - Lisbon to Lorient

The Leg 8 race from Lisbon to Lorient was short, but it was anything but sweet - - from drifting in the Azores to racing into the eye of a storm where record-breaking speeds and heartbreaking boat damage resulted, the shortest leg of the race yet didn't fall short of drama.



Just shy of 2,000 miles, the penultimate leg first lured the teams in with a false sense of security with drifting conditions in the Azores High at the São Miguel Island turning mark.

The six-boat fleet compressed to within just 10 nautical miles as they tacked around the island, completing the first real manoeuvre of what had otherwise been a moderate-paced reaching race that favoured the three Juan K boats; Telefónica, Groupama and PUMA.

The calm before the storm soon passed as the teams raced into an unavoidable gale-force low pressure system in the North Atlantic that made even the most experienced skipper an anxiety ridden insomniac.

"It's hard as skipper sailing into a low pressure system that you know is going to be brutal from a safety standpoint," PUMA skipper Ken Read said.

"I think it was the anticipation of that storm that wears me out. Once you're in it you can deal with it, but it's that anticipation that's not much fun."

The Volvo Open 70s ramped up to speeds in the mid-teens and talk of an IWC Schaffhausen 24-hour Speed Record soon began.

In pole position it was Telefónica who first notched a record, overtaking the 2011-12 race best of 553 set by CAMPER with Emirates Team New Zealand on the Leg 1 race from Alicante, Spain to Cape Town, South Africa.

Soon enough, Chris Nicholson's team were back on top with what would prove an unbeatable result of 565.84 nm.

CAMPER trimmer/helmsman Rob Salthouse, competing in his third Volvo, said racing at such hair-raising speeds was exhilarating stuff, but crazy too.

"I'm told you don't have to be mad but it helps, and if anyone thought that was fun they're mad," he said.

"It was dreadful. We were pushing man and boat to the limit for 48 hours. It was a great battle though, and that's why we do this race.

"It's why we keep coming back to this race – for the battle.

"We had four boats out there going for it, hammer down and on the edge. But doing it for more than two days is pretty stressful!"

But the pressing question on everyone's lips was one of risk versus reward; just how hard could the teams push boat and sailor before something had to give in the face of the plus 50 knot winds and violent seas?

"The last day and a half was really full on, it was mentally hard knowing how hard to push, it's so hard to back off in these boats," Abu Dhabi skipper Ian Walker said.

"There's just such a huge difference between backing off a little and going flat out.

"I'm more amazed that these boats don't break, than when they do break to be honest. We're coming off waves so hard that bunks are breaking down below from the weight of the people landing in them. So you can imagine the loads on everything else."

No one paid a higher price in the high-stakes penultimate leg than former overall race leader Team Telefónica.

The Spanish team first struck trouble on June 14 when the team broke their starboard rudder in 25 knots of wind, losing 11 nautical miles on the fleet and dropping from first to fourth.

The ever defiant crew surged back to the lead within hours before a second round of problems broke their replacement rudder and damaged the port rudder.

As the team dropped off the pace while stabilising their damaged boat the reality sunk in. "We have just seen any chance of us winning this round the world regatta slip away," Martinez said just hours after the incident.

It hadn't been smooth sailing for Groupama either. Just 48 hours from the finish, Groupama faced a potentially dangerous situation as they tried to reduce sail area in preparation for gale-force winds.

The team's mainsail got jammed at the top of the mast leaving bowman Brad Marsh to carry out some mid-sea heroics, climbing to the top of the 31-metre mast three times in winds of well over 20 knots and rough seas. After two hours of repairs, Marsh's skills kept the French team in the race and they only lost out 20 miles to the fleet.

With Telefónica now in survival mode and no threat to the lead, Groupama had the break they needed, completing a heroic comeback that firmed their grip on the overall standings and realising a dream homecoming in their homeport, Lorient.

"It's a very good feeling for sure, it's a dream we had 10 months ago and we realised this



dream now," Groupama skipper Franck Cammas said. "It's not finished, we still have one leg to do and it is important to do this leg very well."

Groupama earned 30 points to move on to a total of 219 points, 23 points clear of their nearest rival PUMA Ocean Racing powered by BERG, who moved into second place with 196.

With just one leg and two in-port races remaining Groupama are in a strong position to claim overall victory in their debut Volvo Ocean Race.

PUMA skipper Ken Read even admitted that while his team certainly could come back and win, it would be tough.

"I hope I'm wrong but I have a feeling we've seen the opportunity to win this race slipping away," Read said.

"That's a big 10 points that they (Groupama) just amassed over us. Good for them, they keep sailing fast and smart, that's a deadly combination.

"Being on the podium is always a good result, I don't mean to sound like I'm whinging, but at the same time maybe we just saw the Volvo Ocean Race go away, so that's kind of a bummer.

Leg 9 - Lorient to Galway

The final offshore of the Volvo Ocean Race 2011-12 -- a flat out 550 mile sprint across the English Channel from Lorient to Galway -- was treated by the teams more like a long in-port race than a short offshore race.

There was drama from the very off, as CAMPER were penalised for a start line incident involving overall race leaders Groupama, leaving Chris Nicholson's team playing catch up.

Team Telefónica tore around the opening inshore section to lead the fleet out of France towards Ireland, followed by PUMA and Abu Dhabi.

Within hours CAMPER were right back in it after cutting the corner of Belle Île and closing the gap on Telefónica to less than a mile, as PUMA and Groupama also jostled for the lead.

With Abu Dhabi suffering from keel problems and Team Sanya's older hull design struggling to keep up with the newer boats, the top four steadily edged away on the first



night as the fleet powered towards Ireland at speeds over 20 knots.

Just six minutes separated the top four when PUMA led around Fastnet Rock off the southern tip of Ireland at around 1030 UTC the next morning, followed by Telefónica, Groupama and CAMPER.

As the wind freshened in the afternoon, the fleet made rapid progress up the west coast of Ireland sailing in fast running conditions, with leaders PUMA under constant attack from their trio of rivals.

By early evening and with the breeze starting to fade, a beleaguered PUMA were struggling to defend against a three-way attack from CAMPER, Groupama and Telefónica.

Around midnight local time CAMPER eased ahead as the top four closed within 10 miles of the Galway finish where massive crowds had packed the race village to await their arrival.

The final two hours were nerve wracking for CAMPER who had to dig deep to hold off overall race leaders Groupama in increasingly fickle winds on the final approach to Galway.

Chris Nicholson's crew held their nerve and crossed the line at 0042 UTC to close out their first leg win of the race and all but lock up second place overall.

Shortly behind them, Franck Cammas' Groupama sailing team began to celebrate as they finished in second place -- a result which sealed their overall Volvo Ocean Race victory at their first attempt.

Ken Read's disappointed PUMA crew ghosted home in third with Iker Martínez's Team Telefónica finishing fourth and around three hours later Mike Sanderson brought Team Sanya home in fifth after previously getting the better of Ian Walker's Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing when they hooked a lobster pot.

Despite finishing in the middle of the night all six teams received a rapturous welcome from the massed crowds in the race village who cheered each and every boat into the harbour.

With just the Discover Ireland In-Port Race left to sail Groupama were confirmed as overall race winners, with CAMPER needing only to finish the in-port to secure second place, ahead of third placed PUMA.