

SKIP NOVAK

CAPE TOWN HAS, OF NECESSITY, ALWAYS BEEN A VITAL STOP FOR SAILORS.
NOW THEY'RE MAKING A POINT OF PAYING A VISIT

At the bottom of Africa, it is a long way from traditional yacht racing venues, other than for scheduled stops or for emergency repairs on the various globetrotting races that are yearly in one form or another. But the 'Tavern of the Seas' has been in focus lately for several headline projects. Cape Town, where I live, is firmly on the map.

Superyachts on a world cruise occasionally pop in, but the 87m ketch *Aquijo* was a showstopper. Arriving in mid-October for a quick refit, her 92m rigs dominated the city skyline for three weeks. She came up from the Indian Ocean and was bound for Europe with a stop in St Helena. I had the privilege of piloting her in Tierra del Fuego and around Cape Horn two years ago.

Some weeks after *Aquijo* departed, the Clipper fleet arrived on a very short pit stop before continuing on to Freemantle, Australia. I ran into Robin Knox-Johnston at the Royal Cape Yacht Club and caught up on news.

We had sailed together around the Horn in 2008 for the BBC programme 'Top Dogs' and immediately the talk turned to sailing expeditions. He tells me he is off to East Greenland next summer...

Robin is now 80 but hands-on, as usual. After I distracted him with various other ideas, he excused himself and rushed off to help repair a rudder on one of the Clipper boats.

Sadly, at the restart of Leg 4 the Clipper yachts *Visit Sanya*, *China* and *Punta del Este* had a port/starboard incident just before a turning buoy in Table Bay. After adjudication and extensive repairs to both boats, this will disqualify *Visit Sanya* from Leg 4. This was a bear away gone wrong, which I suspect was a fouled mainsheet – something a non-professional crewmember might easily do. It is one thing to foul a winch offshore in the middle of nowhere, another when at close quarters at the beginning of an ocean race with 4,000 miles to go to Freemantle.

Visit Sanya (on port) drove their bowsprit right into the cockpit of *Punta del Este*. Luckily no one was injured – or worse. The intensity of racing on the Clipper which started out many years ago

as a rally-cum-race is noteworthy. It is now no rally. Let's not forget that, in the last edition of the Clipper, the yacht *Greenings* ran aground by getting too close to the beach near the Cape of Good Hope. She was unsalvageable and was written off.

No sooner had Clipper left than Giovanni Soldini's Multi70 trimaran *Maserati* pulled in, fresh from breaking various clipper ship records. They were entered for the Cape To Rio Race, which runs in early January. They claimed they could make Rio in six days, in what has become a staggered start event.

Then on 21 November two of the four Ultime trimarans in the Brest Atlantiques Race – yachts that are arguably more aircraft than sailboats – made unscheduled stops. Robben Island, where Mandela was imprisoned, was a mark of this ocean triangle, along with an island turning mark off Brazil.

The trimaran *Macif* drifted outside of Cape Town Harbour for a few hours to effect repairs on the steering system, while *Sodebo* was obliged to enter the port after breaking her starboard rudder and stripping off the back few

metres of that float. Service teams from both boats had flown in and were logistically supported by Manuel Mendez and his boatyard in the V&A Waterfront, who seems to be involved with every visiting yachtsman that comes to Cape Town.

Sadly, while *Macif* took off at speed, skipper Thomas Coville on *Sodebo* was forced to retire after discovering more structural damage in the starboard foil case.

Although Cape Town lends itself by simple geography as an obvious stopover, planned or otherwise, note that the TP52 fleet is arriving in February as deck cargo for a regatta in early March followed by the TP52 Worlds at the end of that month. Clearly, this pre-eminent owner-driver's event has chosen Cape Town for its exotic location, not to mention extracurriculars including the Cape of Good Hope, the Cape winelands and many other tourist attractions. Shark cage diving anyone?

It was all very exciting to see so many ocean going greyhounds in port and such world class events scheduled. This is a boon for Cape Town and for its sailors. Long may it last. ■

'The "Tavern of the Seas" is firmly on the map'

