

SKIP ALLEN'S

View from the Pilothouse

(Editor's note: Red Marston, Southern Boating's veteran consulting editor, reports from Fremantle, Western Australia, on the America's Cup front. He has written a behind-the-scenes article on the massive media operation there, one far exceeding coverage of any previous international yachting event.)

I HAVE BEEN COVERING, these past weeks, America's Cup racing, on these particularly bashing days on the Indian Ocean in which headsails are shredded, booms broken, spinnakers lost, sailors washed overboard, from a vantage point in which I never get a drop of salt water on me. No nearby yachting colleague becomes seasick and hits me instead of the leeward rail. No, I am comfortably seated at a desk, watching the prime racing action on the boisterous seas projected onto a large closed-circuit television monitor.

Over the public address system word comes from time to time on happenings not transmitted on the screen. The TV monitor flashes an advisory on the next action coming up, noting that it will be a rounding of a weather mark, the start of another race, be it among two challenging yachts or a scene from the cut-throat Australian racing.

You can pick what you want to concentrate on. There is no running commentary to confuse things. You can sit back in the welcome silence to see what is going on, be informed or puzzled by certain developments.

Spray flies as 12 meters stick bows into five-foot seas, sheets of water reaching all the way back to the helmsman. The wind gusts to 30 knots and more.

While those who have paid \$30 or more for a place on the bobbing press boat fight to keep their balance, peering at distant action with certain amounts of uncertainty, I walk a few feet from my desk to get a cup of tea and a snack.

Large scoreboards at either end of this installation, the America's Cup media center, formerly used for indoor field hockey games, are frequently updated with rounding times at marks showing who is ahead and by how much.

Almost any direction you turn there is information coming at you. You can walk over to the giant information center manned by the efficient troops from the Italian Yacht Club Costa Smeralda, which does an incredibly efficient job of directing the challenger races. Or you can visit, a few steps away, the Australian defense information center,

which runs its own scoreboard with frequently changing details, point totals going up immediately after the conclusion of a race.

Such service is especially useful to those who have to keep stories moving on the wires, meeting different deadlines in cities around the world. One has only to glance at an array of wall clocks to learn the equivalent times in different zones. This is somewhat helpful, after you discover that when you need to talk to people in the United States they are usually in bed and vice versa.

But the communication *pièce de résistance* for those of us having to report daily on race action in considerable detail on the challengers vying for the Louis Vuitton Cup, that goes to the ultimate challenger, is a sheet available shortly after a race concludes.

Not only are times given for winners of the start but also for the roundings. Beyond that, there are

columns showing average speed, times for each course leg, velocity made good on each leg, time differences between two competing yachts and elapsed times.

On the same sheet are wind velocities, wind direction and sea conditions, if you are too lazy to determine

same by looking at the closed circuit monitors.

For the forgetful there are the opposing skippers, designers, builders and other information that otherwise might annoyingly have to be looked up.

In other words, it's all there on a platter for any reporter from the print media, television or radio outlets. Each magazine has a different schedule but deadlines are deadlines nonetheless. The accumulated information has to be culled from stacks of releases, interviews, and official results in detail. From it, a magazine article can begin to take shape.

Also very useful and timely is the almost daily press conference which takes place at a location near the media center. This eliminates most of the chasing around docks looking for decent quotes from the winning skipper, explanations of what went wrong from the loser.

One great advantage at the Costa Smeralda-Vuitton headquarters is the presence of Bruno Troublé, a former Cup helmsman for French syndicates. He has the knack, fed by his sailing background, to explain in simple terms what may be happening in a confusing situation out on the water or to touch on some of the technical highlights involved.

continues

Covering the America's Cup from a whole new vantage point: no staggering to keep your balance, no ducking the guys headed for the lee rail.