



RACE TWO	1977-78
Winner	Flyer
Skipper	Cornelis van Rietschoten/NED
Boat/Design	Swan 65 (Sparkman and Stephens)
Flag	The Netherlands
Elapsed time	136.05.28.48
Corrected time	119:01:00:36

Podium positions (on corrected time)

1	Flyer (119:01:00:36)
2	King's Legend (121:11:17:24)
3	Traité de Rome (121:18:51:00)

COURSE

Leg 1	Portsmouth - Cape Town
Leg 2	Cape Town - Auckland
Leg 3	Auckland - Rio de Janeiro
Leg 4	Rio de Janeiro - Portsmouth
Distance	26,780 nm
Entries	15 boats

START DATE	LEG DISTANCE	LEG WINNER
27-Aug-77	6,650	Flyer
25-Oct-77	7,300	33 Export
26-Dec-77	7,400	Gauloises II
22-Feb-78	5,430	Gauloises II

1977-78 Overview

- All boats completed the course.
- Heath's Condor was the only yacht to dismast.
- Clare Francis became the first woman to skipper a boat (ADC Accutrac).
- Jackstays fitted along the length of the boat were compulsory.
- It was mandatory for each yacht to report in to Race HQ by radio twice a week.
- The IYRU (now ISAF) gave specific permission to allow the names of the yachts to be that of their sponsor (at the time there was a total ban on such practice).
- Alain Gabbay, skipper of 33 Export was the youngest skipper in the race aged 23
- It cost each crew member £4,000 to sail onboard Great Britain II.
- Traité de Rome was originally built as an Admiral's Cup yacht for German industrialist Willy Illbruck whose son Michael entered and won the 2001-02 Volvo Ocean Race.
- Heath's Condor dismasted on Leg 1 (Peter Blake was among the crew).
- Flyer beat King's Legend into Cape Town (Leg 1) after 38 days at sea by two hours.
- Auckland made its first appearance as a port of call.
- Heath's Condor lost a crew member over the side and only the sight of a flock of albatrosses enabled the helmsman, Peter Blake, to spot Bill Abram in the water and retrieve him unharmed.
- Pen Duick VI with Eric Tabarly barred from competing due to her keel being made of spent Uranium, a substance banned by the authorities.
- Flyer won the race overall on handicap with a 58-hour advantage. King's Legend was second.

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. 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, on board Heath's Condor the new carbon-fibre mast snapped off just above the spreaders.

Heath's Condor sailed under jury rig to Monrovia, some 400 miles away on the west coast of Africa where the crew replaced the carbon-fibre mast with an aluminium version.

The French yacht Japy-Hermés 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.

Debenhams, whose skipper, John Ridgway could perhaps be classed as an adventurer rather than a racing yachtsman, took the most southerly course of any boat and was the first to post lookouts for ice. King's Legend sighted an iceberg at 55 degrees south and other yachts logged them soon after. In a force nine gale Debenhams' course took her into a field of ice in the dark, with snow falling. This was not the way to go yacht racing. For several hours, Ridgway and his crew searched for patches of open water and nudged their way through the pack ice.

The crew of King's Legend discovered a serious leak around the rudderpost. Surrounding yachts were alerted kept in touch with King's Legend every six hours while the crew tried to stem the leak. It was a stark reminder of the isolation of the Southern Ocean. Gauloises II 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.

Bill Abram from Heath's Condor was flung into the air and hurled into the sea when the spinnaker filled and the lazy guy tautened beneath him. Helmsman Peter Blake started the engine to bring the boat round into the wind, but the propeller had frozen shut. Meanwhile, the crew had lost sight of Bill who was clinging to a lifebuoy, but a flock of circling albatrosses marked his position and by cranking up the engine, Blake managed to unlock the blades and retrieve Abraham after 10 minutes in the water. He was unharmed.

Nick Dunlop and Rob James on GBII, both had a line jammed around their waist and legs. The force of the spinnaker was squeezing the life out of Dunlop and all the blood vessels in his eyes had burst before the guy was cut. The crew could not get him down below until he passed out, screaming every time he was touched. He did recover, as did Rob James, who had not been able to walk immediately afterwards.

The weather gods blessed the remainder of Heath's Condor's leg 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 and it wasn't long before Alain Gabbay and 33 Export was in trouble. It was blowing around 45 knots when there was a tremendous bang and the boat rolled 140 degrees. The contents of the chart table emptied into the toilet. There were spanners, files and screwdrivers embedded in the deck head of the galley, floorboards came loose and battery boxes smashed the floor of the saloon.

On Adventure, the crew started 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.

Pen Duick VI arrived in Auckland intending to race the final two legs. Her keel was made of depleted uranium keel, a substance banned by the authorities. A protest was heard, but not resolved before the start. Pen Duick VI was allowed to start the leg on the understanding that she was not a confirmed entry until the Offshore Racing Council considering her case had ruled. They ruled against her and Tabarly was informed by radio that Pen Duick VI was not an official entry

GBII was first round Cape Horn. Flyer was next, rounding in a blinding snowstorm. King's Legend narrowly avoided a collision when 33 Export drew level, overtook and then broached. It was a horrible moment, with a collision only avoided by helmsmanship and a little luck.

33 Export broached while running under spinnaker. Water surged across her decks, slamming Eric Letrosne against the life-rails with such force, it fractured his leg. He needed urgent attention so when the call for medical help went out, Dr Jean Louis Sabarly on Japy-Hermés 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 in Rio Grande 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 de Janeiro 30 minutes ahead of Heath's Condor. On corrected time, Gauloises II won the leg and Flyer was second.

Leg 4 Rio de Janeiro to Portsmouth

The final leg proved uneventful though the competition remained fierce. It was only when the fleet arrived in the English Channel that the conditions suddenly changed. The seas became steep and an angry storm swept through the front-runners.

It was Flyer, in fifth place, that came off worse and suffered a sensational Chinese gybe, which blew the spinnaker to pieces. Skipper Cornelis van Rietschoten was at the wheel and recovered quickly only to be struck by another 55-knot squall as she approached the finish line which was set close to the beach. For a moment she edged sideways and there was a prospect of a disaster in front of the eyes of the officials. Then she clawed up to windward finishing the leg in seventh place on handicap. Although Heath's Condor had earlier claimed line honours, Flyer won the race overall with a 58-hour victory on handicap. Gauloises II 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.