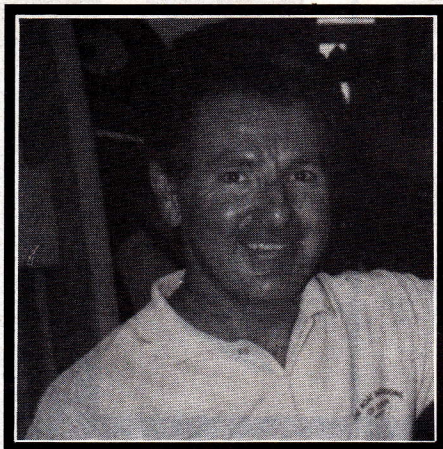


FROM JOHN LARTER



IN 1988 South Africa's first long distance inflatable race was held - the first Wild Coast Challenge. It started at Durban's Vetches Pier and ended at the Wild Coast Casino - a distance of 94km, with an overnight stop.

Forty five entries were attracted and as there were no locally made inflatables available in those days, the entire fleet was made up of imports: Achilles, Avon, Zodiac, Metzler and Bombard. Some of these were big workboats fitted with 90Hp motors. Those early boats were nothing like the South African designed and built boats that are made today to handle any type of sea conditions, so the entrants had a very hard and bone-breaking ride - many did not even finish the first day.

That was the start of racing as we know it today. In one of my subsequent Wild Coast Race write-ups, I made a statement that there would soon be no imported inflatables on the racing circuit. I was shot down in flames by many who claimed a locally produced inflatable would never beat an imported boat. I wonder where those people are today?

Racing decreased in Natal but became more popular in the Cape - mainly because there are more manufacturers in the Cape who could promote their products by competing in local races.

Last year, Natal lost the ever popular Wild Coast race, the Tugela and the Umhlanga race, largely due to lack of sponsorship and the fact that there were no local racers.

But happily, this has now changed and Natal can once again be proud of its teams. A day of fun races was held on the Blue Lagoon in Durban on the 29 September 1991. This event attracted 19 boats in the P550 and P750 classes, and except for a few Aquarius boats from East London, the rest of the field were made up of Natalians with Gemini, Infanta, Robbieduck and Alpha inflatables.

A very fast and interesting looking prototype with a rear steering system and a 50Hp Yamaha was entered by Gemini Natal. It failed, however, to prove itself against the Aquarius and Infanta inflatables. Maybe next time things might be different.

Natalian Brian Moore, a total newcomer to inflatable racing, showed the locals a clean pair of heels and finished third in the Boat Show-room Robbieduck fitted with a 30Hp Yamaha.

A great two hours of racing was had by all with competitive feeling running high. Thanks go to Paul Bevis, the Natal Inflatable Boat Club Racing Officer for a safe and well run event. Everyone is now gearing up for 27 October 1991 at Albert Falls where the next day's racing will be held. This race will have been run by the time you read this, so catch my next column for the results.

Remember, safe boating is consideration to others.

John Larter

(John Larter is the Vice President Safety and Recreation Officer of the South African Inflatable Boat Association)

THE FINAL RESULTS FOR THE DAY'S RACING WERE:

P750	1st	G. Hensburg	Aquarius	East London
	2nd	G. Gower	Aquarius	East London
	3rd	R. Ditchburn	Infanta	Durban
P550	1st	B. Pagel	Aquarius	East London
	2nd	R. Hislop	Infanta	Durban
	3rd	B. Moore	Robbieduck	Durban