

FRENCH SOLO YACHTSMAN OFF BRUNY IS

Mail from lone sailor

LONE round-the-world sailor Bernard Moitessier made his first contact with the outside world for at least eight weeks when he signalled a fisherman in Tasmanian waters on Wednesday morning.

Moitessier (43), a Frenchman, was last reported just south of Capetown in his 42ft steel ketch Joshua.

News of his contact with Snug fisherman Varley Wisby became known yesterday.

Wisby, who was out fishing on Wednesday morning with his sons, Ross(20) and Robin(17) reported:

- he spotted Moitessier's yacht about half way between Cape Bruny Light and Actaeon Island, about 50 miles south west of Hobart.
- Moitessier signalled him to within about 12ft and threw him a "mail-box".
- The Frenchman asked about the weather, enjoyed a chat, and went on his way.

Messages delivered

Moitessier is chasing hard after Britain's Robin Knox-Johnston, leader of the \$10,714 "Sunday Times" single-handed round-the-world yacht race.

He has not been allowed to take on fuel, food or water since he left Plymouth four months ago.

Yesterday, when Wisby delivered Moitessier's mail and messages to the Commodore of Tasmania (Mr J.M.Hickman) he said the yachtsman "looked in high spirits and good health".

Mr Wisby (40) was on a six-day fishing trip in his 42 ft fishing boat, Spring Bay.

"It was about 6 am.", he said.

"We were about four or five miles away when we sighted the yacht.

"The yacht looked as though it had stopped and was signaling to us with an aldis lamp." he said.

"When we moved to within about 50 yards, he hailed us with a megaphone.

"he told us who he was, and said to be careful that we didn't come too close as he didn't have an engine and he would not be able to get out of the bay.

Mr Wisby said he moved in alongside the yacht and talked to Moitessier from about 12ft away.

"He asked me personally to deliver some messages and letters in a container to the local commodore.

"I told him we wouldn't be going home for a couple of days, and he said it couldn't be helped."

Moitessier had plenty of whiskers, and he looked in high spirits and good health.

"We asked him if he wanted anything and he said he didn't."

Mr Wisby said Moitessier asked what sort of weather he could expect, and he said it would be south-west.

"And that way it was in fact south west" Mr Wisby said.

The yachtsman told Mr Wisby he could keep the impressive looking plastic grey and red waterproof container as a souvenir.

"But the only thing I regret is that I didn't have a camera." Mr Wisby said.

Commodore contacted

After being out for the past six days, Wisby arrived back in port at Margate yesterday morning, and immediately rang Mr Hickman and told of his experiences.

In the letter Mr Hickman received from Moitessier, the yachtsman said he was "sailing around the world (well...trying at least).

The letter asked Mr Hickman to forward all the letters and the plastic container.

He said he had left Plymouth on August 20, and lonely and becalmed in the Indian ocean, he had fed and played with friendly seagulls.

Mr Hickman said that as a gesture from the royal Yacht Club of Tasmania, he immediately cabled one of the recipients of the letters to be sure they would receive the information by Christmas.

He sent this cable to a Pierre Lavat, of Paris:

Competing for prize

"Bernard Moitessier yacht Joshua contacted fisherman 0600 hours Wednesday, 18th December, four miles west of South Bruny light, going well, high spirits, both in excellent condition, mail follows, Merry Christmas, Commodore Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania."

Moitessier is competing for prize-money offered by the "Sunday Times" in London for the single-handed yachtsman who completes the fastest, non stop circumnavigation without outside physical assistance.

No fuel, food, or water may be taken aboard after the start.

The "Sunday Times" is also offering a "golden globe" award to the first non-stop single-handed circumnavigator of the world, whose yacht must start and finish at the same port in a Northern latitude and must round the three capes, Good Hope, Leeuwin and Horn.

The same yachtsman may win both awards.

An international panel of judges is headed by Sir Francis Chichester.

Last Saturday, Moitessier was officially estimated to be somewhere off the Tasmanian coast. This was based on his last reported position just south of Capetown, eight weeks ago.

He is chasing the leader, Britain's Robin Knox-Johnston, as a 29-year-old merchant navy captain, who was last heard of on November 8, heading for Cape Horn in his 32ft ketch Suhaili.

Knox-Johnston drew alongside the Port Phillip Bay pilot boat Wyruna on November 8, three and a half miles south-west of

Point Lonsdale Lighthouse.

He tossed two Wyuna sailors a canister, containing log books, letters addressed to Britain, films and a chart showing his daily positions across the Indian Ocean and along the southern coast of Australia.

Moitessier is reported to be averaging 128,4 miles a day, and Knox-Johnston 98,3.

If the rates are maintained, Moitessier could catch and pass the leader several weeks before the finish, which is expected in

May.

Moitessier left Britain nine weeks after Knox-Johnston, and has been overhauling him at an average of 30 miles a day.

The other solo yachtsmen still in the race are 45-year-old Nigel Tetley, reported off Capetown on November 28, and Donald Crowhurst (35), who was last positioned off the East Coast of Africa on December 10.

Photo légendée:

Snug fisherman Varley Wisby(left) plays postman for round-the-world French navigator Bernard Moitessier.

Yesterday, he was pictured handling over the mail and messages he collected from Moitessier, to the Commodore of the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania (Mr J. M. Hickman), to whom he sent a special letter (left).

Mr Wisby didn't return from his "rounds" until yesterday morning after a six-day fishing expedition.

Lettre de Bernard Moitessier au Commodore:

The 18th December

Dear Commodore,

This comes from the french yacht JOSHUA, sailing non stop around the world (well...trying at least!) I would be very grateful to you if you could forward all the letters and the plastic envelop included in this container.

Joshua left Plymouth the 22th of August. I had terrible calms in the Indian Ocean, but that gave me a nice time playing with the seagulls who became very friendly: they probably have difficulty to get food from the sea in calm weather, so I could feed them and they became accustomed to me.

Anyway, I would like very much all these messages to be posted as soon as possible, so that they could arrive in time before Christmas.

Many thanks.

Bernard Moitessier
