

Cardiac crew sets sights on fun, adventure of race to Maui

IF YOU figure the coast guard was looking the other way when the owl and the pussycat went to sea, check out this crew:

Skipper: Dr. Tom deRoos, chief of staff at St. Mary's Hospital. Experienced deep-sea sailor. Has had coronary bypass surgery.

Owner-manager: Dr. Rex Ferris, forensic pathologist at Vancouver General Hospital. Recreational boater. Has had coarctation surgery to remove congested section of aorta.

Engineer-cook: Bart Bastein, Vancouver coroner. Has limited sailing experience but knows tugs, fishboats and diesels. Has had mitral-valvotomy to replace faulty heart valve.

Crew member: Tony Beeftink, Salmon Arm physical education teacher. No sailing experience but competes in dry-land marathons. Described as fit and keen. Became



DENNY BOYD

B.C.'s second heart transplant recipient in 1988.

Crew member: Cmdr. (Ret.) Andrew Malysheff. Former RCN corvette skipper. Has had coronary bypass surgery.

Crew member: Don Mair. Vancouver sailing instructor. Has had coronary bypass surgery.

Crew member: Vic Chatt, Quesnel recreational boater. Has had coronary bypass surgery.

Average crew age, mid-50s.

Vessel: Eleven-year-old 40-foot ketch, Nuance, built by Hughes Boats of Toronto.

Objective: To sail Nuance, with above crew, in 2,500-mile International Victoria-Maui Yacht Race in July.

Secondary objectives: To prove that heart surgery patients can live an active life and to raise research funds for B.C. Heart Foundation through pledges.

(Why is my head echoing with the words of the childhood song, "A capital ship for a sailing trip/Was the Walloping Window Blind.")

This whole wonderful, unlikely adventure was cultivated in the mind of Nuance's owner, Dr. Ferris, the coarctation survivor, while he was in the VGH lab doing whatever it is that pathologists do.

"I had my surgery while I was still in medical school and I've been able to live a very full life. Last summer, I was looking for

something, some project, that would involve post-surgery heart patients and would prove they don't have to live like cripples. I thought about the Maui race and said, 'Great, that's it.' Then I started pulling a crew together. A few people said, 'Wonderful idea, but you're crazy.' I don't think we're crazy.

"Our crew are not teenagers. There will be stress and we'll have to be fit. It's my boat but I'm not skippering because I don't have the offshore experience that Tom deRoos has. He's done that distance. My boat is slow but it's very stable and we'll have it fitted like a sea-going ambulance with all the necessary cardiac life support systems, monitors and defibrillator. Whatever medication the crew needs, we'll duplicate in the emergency rafts. We'll have to be careful about seasickness, which can

lead to dehydration.

"We'd like to get corporate sponsorship to cover costs of outfitting the boat and we'll be looking for performance pledges from the public, a dollar a mile, a penny a mile, to turn over for heart research. But the main thing is to do it and prove to other patients that your life doesn't end if you have your chest cut open."

In Tom deRoos, who had his bypass in 1986, the Nuance and crew will be getting the most enthusiastic and right-good captain this side of HMS Pinafore.

He says, "I'm convinced this thing is absolutely do-able. It isn't important for us to win the race, just to do the race so we won't push it to the limit. Rex and the crew haven't had offshore experience but I have Netherlands skippers on both sides of my family and I've

done this kind of distance three times. I know we'll probably go 20 days without a shower unless it rains, so we'll start to smell. We'll be on the Pritikin diet, mostly fish, so we'll be doing some fast trolling. And I know just what a wonderful experience being a member of a crew can be. It's going to be exciting and rewarding to all of us."

Perhaps part of the case is already proven by the inclusion of 39-year-old Beeftink on the crew. Suffering from viral cardiomyopathy, he was given two weeks to live in 1988. On Boxing Day that year, he received a new heart. In May of 1991 he completed the Vancouver Marathon and speculated that the unknown donor "must have been a runner."

With any luck, that donor may have hauled some sails as well.

Denny Boyd writes Monday, Wednesday and Friday.