

Yachting legends join forces for Hobart race

Paul Keating would have called them a beautiful set of numbers: 13 times across the Indian Ocean, 10 across the Pacific and 10 across the Atlantic. Around the Cape of Good Hope eight times and Cape Horn five times. Through the Suez and Panama canals four times apiece and 40 times across the Great Australian Bight.

Phew. And that's just Jon Sanders. David Dicks can add his numbers, too, including his legendary single-handed, non-stop circumnavigation of the world at the tender age of 18. Together, they are the world's oldest and youngest solo

circumnavigators, with Sanders completing both a dizzying double and a triple non-stop circumnavigation.

There is a long list of sailing records, too. Piddling by comparison, of course, including Sanders' gong for the longest period spent alone at sea — a mere 657 days, 21 hours and 18 minutes.

Now the Old Salt and his junior are teaming up again with five others to make another tilt on this year's Sydney-to-Hobart yacht race in a yacht whose very name, *Perie Banou II*, conjures up memories of past glories.

Of those, she's had a few in her 37 years. Sanders sailed her round the world and she has competed in the Sydney-to-Hobart race twice before, for a third place overall and a third in her division. Dicks has been there before, too, crewing for Sanders when he was just 16. They don't let them compete so young now.

It is 14 years since brave little *Perie Banou II* has had a makeover and that is what happening in a

dusty Henderson workshop. It was well deserved. Apart from her circumnavigation of the world, she's also completed two Fremantle-to-Bali races. But in fact the need for some maintenance came before the plan for the big race.

"We knew she needed some work so it seemed a good idea to have a reason to do it," Sanders said, emerging from her innards.

He'll be 69 when the 39ft (11.9m) *Sparkman and Stephens* boat heads out through Sydney Heads on Boxing Day. David Dicks, at 30, will be considerably younger than the boat. Naturally, neither is in the least concerned at the possibility of the kind of rough weather which led to the loss of six lives during the 1998 race. In fact, the rougher it is the happier they'll be, since their little boat will be at her best in those conditions. Safety regulations have been tightened since then and participants have had to complete a course which required them to be immersed in the ocean, fully dressed, for almost an hour.

Dicks will skipper the boat, a title he regards as a formality. "We're all equal," he says. "And Jon is our secret weapon. We all owe Jon a lot. He introduced most of us to sailing and has shaped who we are.

"And of course, we want to be there with him to take on this incredible challenge."

Supporting the endeavour is the Australian Sailing Museum, which was opened recently by another legendary WA yachtsman and sailmaker, Rolly Tasker. Like other sponsors (and yes, more would be welcome), his contribution will be in kind.

The other crewmen are Ben Punch, Murray Barwick, Derek Baxter, Neil Rock and Michael Foster.

Sanders still spends a lot of his time alone on the high seas, delivering boats around the world. He will sail *Perie Banou II*, alone naturally, to Sydney for the race, his 41st crossing of the Bight.