

HE READ ABOUT US IN A MAGAZINE-

So He Sailed Alone In A Little Boat To Find Out

WHILE the people of New Zealand were remembering Abel Tasman's discovery of the land on its 300th anniversary, another adventurous sailor was approaching the end of a voyage hardly less bold than the Dutchman's. Vito Dumas, Argentine *estanciero*, athlete, air-pilot, and yachtsman, navigated his 31-foot yacht *Lehg II*, from Buenos Aires to Capetown and from Capetown to Wellington, taking 104 days on the second stage. He made the journey alone, and will continue alone, making next for Chile.

The fact that Vito Dumas speaks hardly any English was a natural check to his own desire to break a long silence, and the desire of his new hosts to know all about him, what he thinks, and what he has seen. So conversation with port authorities, journalists, and fellow yachtsmen has mostly been made in imperfect French, with the help of pantomime and Senor Dumas' rudimentary English.

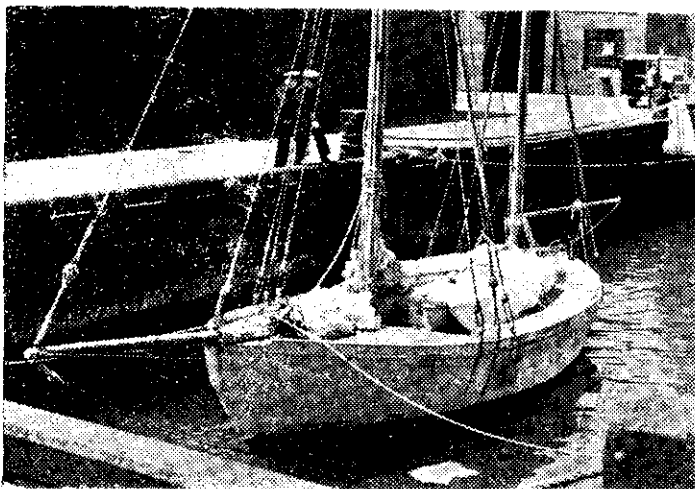
A few days after his arrival, he was entertained by Wellington yachtsmen and, through an interpreter, answered questions in French. He described his food supplies, water stores (in two tanks, one of which sprang a leak during the journey), and so on. He had no radio, and read no books, because it was "not necessary." The incident of the poisoned arm (when he wondered for a time whether he would reach land alive), still sounded frightening when translated through French into unrevised English, and the story of how his primus turned turtle in its gimbals lost none of its comedy. He had set out with the intention of coming to New Zealand because he had read about it in the *National Geographic Magazine*, he told them. The name of his yacht (*Lehg II*), was "a sentimental name."

"What were your impressions on seeing your own land disappear and then on first seeing this land?" he was asked. The question puzzled him. "Many, many impressions," he said, and was unable to go further, except to say that from a distance the land had a "hostile" appearance to a man who had been 100 days alone with the sea—it was rugged, and potential with dangers that the sea did not offer; but soon a suburb of Wellington, which Senor Dumas has since learned to call Lyall Bay, came into view with its "little houses and streets, very peaceful and soothing to the nerves to see." When someone asked him if he had seen any ships on the way he pointed at a Naval Officer who was present, and said "Not talk; shipman here."

As conversation grew freer, I took advantage of a moment's confusion to



An Interview In Three Languages



Above: Senor Vito Dumas, the Argentine yachtsman: and his boat

rattle off a prepared sentence in Spanish which I had just brushed up that morning after several years' disuse. Quickly he gripped my arm, and in a moment we had agreed to have further conversation, perhaps *manana*.

On Board

Manana came, and I made my way to the boat-harbour. A boy with a dinghy agreed to take me to *Lehg II*, where I knew I must find Senor Dumas "at home," since he had no dinghy with him, and was depending on good luck to get on and off shore himself. Down the hatch I went with a shout, and there he was, with three sailors. What they'd been talking about heaven only knows, since none of them seemed to have any Spanish or French. However, it seems that common interests break down language barriers between men of

the sea, because when the visitors left, Dumas told me: "Very good boy, the navy boy, very good boy."

When I gave him a message to the effect that the commodore of the yacht club was calling for him soon, Dumas decided to change from his rough trousers and sweater into presentable clothes. With no attempt to excuse myself, I began to poke around inquisitively, preparing questions in Spanish during long silences.

Clothes and Food

"Hace calor o Fria?" he asked me, pointing outside. I told him it was hot, rather than cold, and added "Il n'y a pas de vent," which meant an exceptionally hot day for Wellington. Thus dodging about among three languages we managed to understand each other. He produced a gorgeous assortment of ties, and carefully chose one to go with a light green check suit, newly dug out of a big chest. Then came the appalling discovery that mildew had got into the clothes. Shirts, a cream silk coat, trousers, all were spotted. While Dumas changed, I inspected the "kitchen," which is immediately below the hatch. There were the two primuses, slung in gimbals to permit swinging against the motion of the vessel, and a kerosene lamp, all much corroded; food tins held in shelves with holes like the family tooth-brushes; a tiny sink about eight by 12 inches, with taps over it. Corroded utensils lay about, and tins of meat extract, made in the Argentine by an English firm, all empty. He showed me his last tin, nearly empty, and explained that a spoonful with water makes "nice soup." With the help of a dictionary which he produced, I asked what he ate to prevent scurvy, and was shown bottles of vitamin tablets, "Productos de los Laboratorios Glaxo." Empty Glucolin tins lay about bearing yet another British name.

This seemed to call for comment, so I laughed and said "Todos Ingleses." "Yes, yes," said Senor Dumas, "all English," and he reeled off the names of English "benefactors" of the Argentine. The name of R. B. Cunningham-Graham touched a happy memory, and he gave a charming imitation of "Don Roberto" trotting down a London street on a real pampa horse. Then he went on with his dressing, and I opened a large box containing what I thought was a pile of pale white seaweed. On inspection it proved to be a tangled mass of potato sprouts, with the original potatoes shrivelled away to nothing. I laughed, and so did Senor Dumas. "My farm!" he said.

Finally he got into his Argentine shoes, light, but with very thick rubber soles and a faint resemblance to cater-

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