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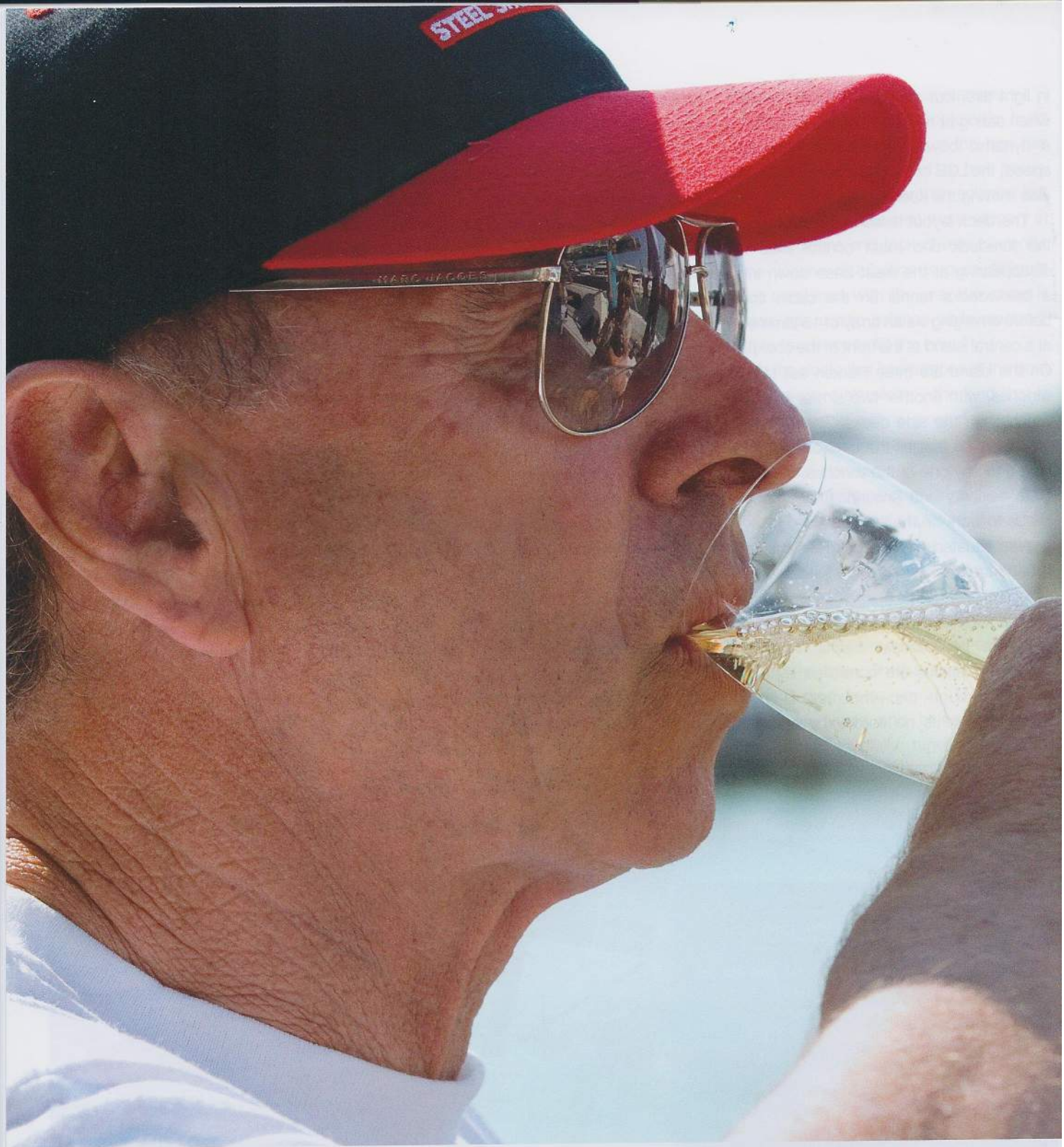
ASTRAL EXPRESS RETURN TO NZ

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Graeme Kendall claims sailing glory

"It's a wrap!" declared Graeme Kendall as he steered his yacht, *Astral Express*, into the Customs dock on Auckland harbour to check in after a record-setting solo circumnavigation.

The yacht, and for that matter, its 64-year old skipper looked as fresh as if they had just returned from a weekend trip

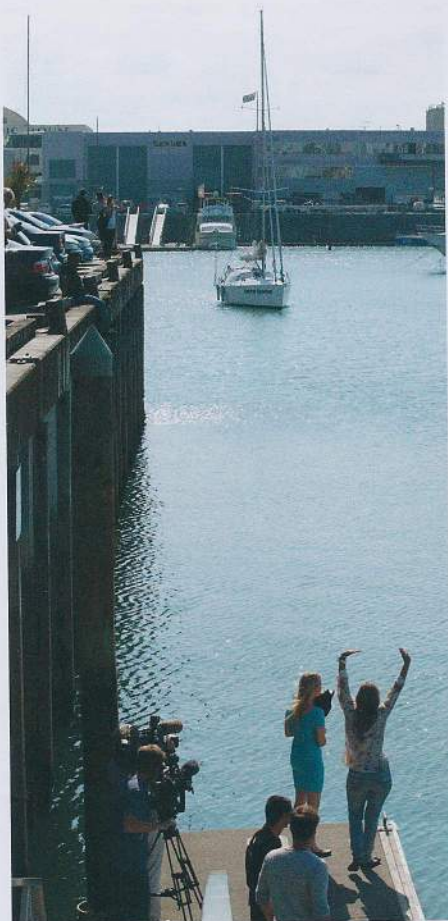
Words & Pictures by Ivor Wilkins

to Kawau Island. Yet, together they had just completed an epic voyage round the world via the notorious Arctic North West Passage.

The successful traverse of the passage

in 12 days was a new solo sailing record and, still to be ascertained, possibly the fastest under sail.

Looking fit and relaxed, a delighted Kendall sipped champagne and hugged family and well-wishers at a welcome ceremony in the Viaduct Basin. On hand to greet the Squadron member was Vice



Commodore Steve Burrett and Auckland Mayor Len Brown.

As his voyage drew to a close, Kendall posted a note on his website: "Great way to arrive into New Zealand waters with an escort of dolphins. Beautiful morning calm sea, light wind, clear sky and landfall on Poor Knights Islands ahead. Barometer high and forecast is good. It's like a pat on the back after encountering all extremes during this 10,000 mile journey. Boat is ship shape with one day to go."

As *Astral Express* docked in Auckland's Viaduct Basin, the adventurer remarked on his final run down the New Zealand coast in the glorious Labour Weekend weather: "It was a great sail into Auckland. You don't often get such good conditions on this coast."

Coming at the conclusion of a circumnavigation that took in some of the most inhospitable areas of the planet, one imagines that even New Zealand's sometimes less than clement weather would hold few fears, but he acknowledged that he had an attack of the nerves shortly before his arrival.



His worst moments were hitting the ice with an enormous crash, running aground in the North West Passage and storms in the Bering Strait. On September 8, Kendall posted this message on his website: "Currently sailing north of ice near Prudhoe Bay north Alaska at 71.38n 153w. Easterly winds have faded and now a good NW coming in which is perfect as I am now sailing SW on a course for Barrow Point. Barrow Point signals the end of the fabled North West Passage and I should round there later tonight. Will be drinking double doubles tonight!

"It has taken 12 days; I was last in and the first out and have been told that I am the



Greenland businessman Edward Niclasen

first solo sailing attempt of the full course and non stop. The plan is to continue non stop to Auckland which will complete a 27,000 mile solo circumnavigation."

Back in Auckland, he celebrated an extraordinary achievement. "Having finished what I started is a great feeling," he said.

Kendall's original mission was to complete the unique circumnavigation non-stop, but he had to abandon the attempt in 2005 when the North West Passage remained impenetrable. He sold his kevlar 12.5m Elliott yacht to Greenland businessman Ed Niclasen and returned to New Zealand. However, in an amazing gesture, Niclasen offered to lend him the boat if ever he wanted to complete the journey.

On hand to meet Kendall in Auckland, Niclasen shrugged off his own generosity. "It was a good project," he said. "I am very pleased to see him."

While Kendall was taking his first steps ashore after 68 days at sea, Niclasen slipped aboard and looked over the boat.

"Is she OK, Ed?" enquired Kendall. With the boat in showroom condition, Niclasen,



Reunited with family and friends, solo circumnavigator Graeme Kendall arrives in Auckland.

a man of few words, simply nodded. He will not be taking *Astronaut Express* back to Greenland. "There is really not much opportunity to sail up there," he said. "I will put her up for sale."

Kendall's voyage has earned him a 2010 Yachting New Zealand Cruising Award. He is one of nine Squadron members to either receive or be nominated for YNZ awards this year. Ross Munro and Sarah and Sefton Powrie will receive awards for Services to Yachting. Harold Bennett and Guy Pilkington are among four finalists for the inaugural Coach/Official of the Year award. Neville Crichton (Offshore Racing), Simon Minoprio's BlackMatch team (World Match Racing Tour) and Jo Aleh and Olivia Powrie (Olympic Class 470) will all receive Performance Awards.

All the award winners will be in the running for the title of Singapore Airlines Sailor of the Year 2010 and to receive the Sir Bernard Fergusson Trophy.

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