

The programme of events at the launching of Albatros II on 14th November 1970 was roughly as follows:

1. Welcoming speech by Ted Stent
2. Speech by Stanley Thesen
3. Short speech by John Goodwin
4. Speech by the Mayor of Knysna
5. Presentation of posies
6. Launching ceremony by Hildur Stent
7. Albatros II moved slowly away to signal blasts on the Thesen hooter
8. Beer and sausage party for all attending the Ceremony – between 1 500 and 2 000 persons!

Following Ted Stent's speech, attached, Mr Stanley Thesen made a very good short speech. Actual detail is not at present available but it is hoped to take this from a tape recording in due course.

Briefly he stressed the big part played by Mr Whatmough and the Marine Division men in the construction of "Albatros II" and congratulated them on the results.

He talked about the Skipper, Mr John Goodwin and his crew, and announced to applause that Hal Thesen, his son, was to be a member of the crew.

Stanley ended with an appropriate and charming quotation from Tennyson,
"Sunset and the evening star and one clear call for me ...
... and let there be no moaning of the bar when I put out to sea ..."

Mr John Goodwin, in the first speech he's ever made, according to his wife Laurel, gave an impression of the route to Rio and the competition from beautiful yachts that would face him and his crew. What he said will probably also be available in due course from the tape recordings.

After Goodwin had finished, Ted Stent asked the Mayor of Knysna, Mr Ernest Meyer, whether he would like to say a few words as he had spontaneously mentioned that this would be appropriate. He kindly wrote out what he had said, which is attached.

While the Major was climbing the steep stairs of the launching platform, Ted Stent mentioned that "Qumbu", Leslie Orpen's yacht, was lying out there in the lagoon, saying it was amazing to think that a small town like Knysna will have two yachts in the Cape to Rio Race.

At the conclusion of the Mayor's speech Ted Stent announced that there was a small ceremony to be held at this stage and called upon Georgina, Hjalmar and Judy's daughter, to present a posy, and Bridget Paddon a sapphire brooch from her husband

and grandchildren to mark the occasion to Hildur Stent. Then Andy, Ros and Stanley's daughter, presented a posy to Laurel Goodwin, the Skipper's wife, and Helen, Kath and Duncan Jamieson's daughter, a posy to Ros Thesen. Ted Stent announced each presentation as they occurred.

Thereafter Hildur, at the third attempt which she announced as "third time lucky", broke the bottle of champagne on "Albatros II". Hildur's words were "God bless 'Albatros II' and all who serve on her".

With Thesen's hooter blasting salutes for several minutes, "Albatros II" then moved slowly down the launching slipway towards the lagoon, leaving us on our high launching platform to realize how high above the crowd we were. It was unfortunate that in the end it was not possible to float "Albatros II" off her cradle that evening, but this was successfully achieved by means of minor adjustments to the cradle on the following evening.

While the yacht moved away, Ted Stent invited all present to join the family at a "beer and sausage" party before they left. Joan-Marie Paddon said she could not imagine any family nowadays issuing such a public invitation which was almost "feudally archaic" – particularly as there was no discrimination as to race or colour. The party went off well and the coloured participants with their own bar behaved extraordinarily well.

Carefully organized in all its facets, it was a relief to all responsible that the launching ceremony, simple as it was, went off according to plan. So many people helped to make it so, including Provincial and Municipal traffic officers!

H.E.E. Stent – Speech at Launching of Albatros II 14.11.1970

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My wife always tells me that I should not start a speech by saying it's "my honour and privilege" to do so as this expression is too often used. Nevertheless I do feel it's a very great privilege and a very great honour that I speak on behalf of the whole Thesen family and the Company when I welcome you all to this launching of our 42-foot yacht Voortrekker, er, er Albatros II today.

This function we consider to be the highlight of our Company's Centenary Year. It is wonderful to realize from seeing the crowd of well-wishers here that it is not only a great occasion for the family and Company but also for Knysna and in fact the Southern Cape. There are guests here from Mossel Bay, George, Oudtshoorn, Plettenberg Bay and as far afield as Port Elizabeth, as well as many from Knysna and its district. We thank you for coming and hope your good wishes will go with Albatros II in the race from Cape to Rio early next year.

Before proceeding with the main part of this speech, I would like firstly to thank especially "Rembrandts" for not only providing the public address system but for authorizing Mr Ludeman to operate it, and "Mobil Oil" for all the pennants which are making everything look gay.

Secondly, the organization behind this function has meant hard work for all concerned but I would especially like to thank certain members of the staff for their enthusiastic support and suggestions making it possible. They are Mrs Chaplin, Miss Jenner, Mr Alex Bernardo, Mr Derrick Perks and many others, but by no means least Mr du Paepe who has worked so hard and successfully to get everything ready in time.

We are honoured to see that the Mayors of Knysna and Plettenberg Bay are here with their wives, and that members of the Knysna Town Council and the Divisional Council are also present. Here on Stand B, to the left of me, are many special guests who have helped us in various ways not only this year but in the past, and we are pleased that they are here with us today.

We are very pleased that the Skipper of Albatros II for the Cape To Rio Race, Mr John Goodwin, and two of his crew, Mr Brian Lello and Mr John Allen, all dressed up in their red and white crew uniforms which will match the colour of the yacht's spinnaker, which is red with a large white star, and their wives are here too. There is another on the yacht in crew uniform whose name will be announced later by our Managing Director, Mr Stanley Thesen.

This occasion is really a Thesen family affair. It is many years since there has been such a crowd of them all together in Knysna. All sixty on the stands behind and around me,

except some husbands and wives, are descendants of the founder of the Company, Arndt Leonard Thesen. Some of them are sons and daughters of Charles Wilhelm Thesen and Nils Peter Thesen who were the first joint managing directors of Thesen and Co (Pty) Ltd when it was incorporated in 1905. Charles Wilhelm was only nine years old and Nils Peter a few years older when the Thesen schooner, Albatros, sailed into Table Bay on 16th November 1869, with the whole of Arnt Leonard's family, and his brother Captain Mathias Thesen and his son, on board. That is almost to the day 101 years ago and today is an appropriate day for this launching, as it is the birthday of Charles Wilhelm.

Members of the family here today have come from far afield – from England, Spain, Rhodesia and all over the Republic. I propose to mention a few of them specially.

1. We are all pleased that Rolf Thesen, a son of Charles, has been able to come out from England with his wife. They have been joined by their daughter, Barbara Hickman, and a grandson from Rhodesia.
2. We are particularly pleased that three daughters of Nils Peter are here with us. They are Mrs Thelma Findlay with her husband from Cape Town, Mrs Joy van Zyl also from Cape Town with her daughter and grandson from Johannesburg, and Sylvia Thesen from Durban. A daughter of Richard Thesen, their brother, Ivy Blem and her husband are also here from Durban.
3. Then there is Mrs Marie Tose, youngest daughter of Charles Wilhelm, with her husband and daughter. Marie and my wife are also descendants of the Captain of the original Albatros.
4. Mrs Kitsy Boltman is purring happily with all her children and some grandchildren here. They are the sons and daughters of Kitsy and Eric These and are Stanley These, our Managing Director, his brother, Director Charles, and sisters Kath Jamieson from Uitenhage and Nicolette Benningfield from Zululand.
5. There are sons, daughters and grandchildren of Harry Thesen, Louie Ryan, Ella Thornley Jones, Katie Reid, all children of Charles Thesen. I am not going to mention all of them as there are so many. But we are pleased that Hugh Ryan finally arrived in time after abandoning a Mercedes in Middelburg. Pam Hutcheson and her daughter have come all the way from Spain and lastly Nimmo Reid and his whole family suddenly appeared from Kokstad.
6. Last, but not least in her husband's estimation, is Hildur Stent, another daughter of Charles Thesen. She will in due course launch "Albatros II" – both our children and some grandchildren are here.

7. Many of us are sorry that this is school examination time as there are so many of the younger generation who could not be present.
8. Many of the descendants of our founder Arnt Leonard Thesen and his brother Capt. Mathias Thesen of the Albatros have been unable to attend but particularly I regret that Jan Deneys Reitz was unable to come. He is the grandson of Blanka Thesen, the beautiful daughter of Arnt Leonard who married the President of the Orange Free State.

There have been many telegrams – one from Aunt Helen Theodor and Alexa Wallis from Salisbury, and another from Richard Thesen from Durban.

Before handing over the Stanley Thesen who will perhaps tell you more about Albatros II, I would like to say how proud our family-owned Company is to celebrate its Centenary this year. We like to think that each generation who has been at the helm has maintained the good traditions set by its founders and their subsequent family successors. Moreover, throughout our hundred years, we have been privileged to have the support, loyalty and interest of our employees who with the family have built up the Company to what it is today.

The Thesen flag with its white star is flying above us and at the masthead of Albatros II. The gold rind piece is safely embedded at the foot of the mast – all is ready for the launching. But I must tell you the latest story of the flag. A few days ago one of our sawmilling friends brought his young sons down to Thesen's. This young man is much traveled with a knowledge of hotels. He gave one long look at the flag and said, "Thesen's cannot be a very good company as it only has one star"!

In spite of that, we are probably prouder of our "one star" than others may be of flags with many stars. It has flown on Thesen ships since before the end of the last century and we hope will fly its way to Rio, encouraging Albatros II to victory.

Address by Mr Ernest Meyer, Mayor of Knysna

Mr and Mrs Stent, Mr Stanley Thesen, member of the Thesen family, Mr Goodwin, ladies and gentlemen:

On this happy and memorably occasion the first opportunity is afforded to me, representing the citizens of Knysna, to offer to the Thesen family our very sincere and very hearty congratulations on the occasion of their centenary celebrations, and I do so with a deep sense of appreciation of and gratitude for the very real and very substantial contribution which this pioneering family has made, and which it continues to make to the growth and development and economic well-being of Knysna and district.

There is no need, nor does time permit, for me to relate to you the exploits of the original Thesen family which a century ago arrived in this southern tip of the African continent from the far and distant north in the relatively small sailing vessel, the original Albatros. I could enthral you with details of the many trials and tribulations which beset this family in their initial endeavours to establish themselves here – of the many problem which they had to overcome and which they in fact overcame through dint of hard work, through determination and application and, above all, through faith in that Higher Hand which had guided them safely across the oceans to this beautiful corner of the world. And those problems and difficulties which they were unable to solve by the more conventional methods I have mentioned, they succeeded in overcoming through sheer weight of numbers. And so, in time, as the family expanded its activities in various directions of commerce and industry, Knysna became synonymous with Thesens, and Thesens with Knysna and, if due to the anticipated development of our town, this synonymy should decline somewhat, the fact remains that there could never be a Knysna without the Thesens and there could never be Thesens without Knysna.

How fitting and appropriate is it not that in celebration of their centenary, Thesens should recapture something of the spirit and the courage and the faith of their forebears by constructing and entering this magnificent yacht, Albatros II, for the forthcoming Cape To Rio race.

As befits the descendants of a seafaring nation famous for the daring exploits of the Vikings, Thesens have maintained a very active and live interest in the sea and in the construction of boats from the smallest dinghy to the larger ocean-going vessels, culminating in the well-known Voortrekker and now Albatros II. And when we gaze upon this beautiful yacht with its sleek and gracious lines and, if I may coin a word, its “disassociated” appearance like its feathered counterpart, we are filled with admiration for the skill of workmanship demanded in its construction.

To Thesens, to the designer and to everyone engaged upon its planning and construction, down to the lowliest workman, we pay tribute and offer our sincere

congratulations. And to Mr Goodwin and the members of his crew we say this afternoon: God Speed, happy sailing, fair and favourable winds and, though to me this is of secondary importance, may you be the first to cross the line at Rio. We will follow your fortunes with the keenest interest, you will constantly be in our thoughts and in our prayers, because you will be sailing for Thesens and, therefore, for Knysna.

In conclusion, just a thought to leave in your midst – as it was fitting, I believe, that I should have been asked to represent the public of Knysna at this launching ceremony, so too, I feel, would it be most appropriate for Knysna to be represented in Rio when Albatros II does in fact sail into this fair harbour ahead of her rivals!

Letter from H.E.E. Stent

2nd December 1970

To all Shareholders and Family,

I do not know how many of you are making scrap books for our Centenary year. Whether you are or not, I do feel the enclosed cuttings about the launching of Albatros II will be of interest. Some of them you may have seen in your own newspapers. A few I have not been able to include for all of you as I could not get sufficient copies, but as far as possible I have excluded those some may have been, for instance in the Cape Times.

The cutting of the George and Knysna Herald has a wonderful selection of photographs but the article has caused some concern and has resulted in a further article from the Editor which almost amounts to an apology! I feel he did not realize that it was meant to be a family affair, that V.I.P.s were not actually invited, and that overall it was intended to be simple, and I think also succeeded in being, dignified in its way.

All who attended I feel thoroughly enjoyed the launching itself and the family party held at Doaty Chaplin's home after it. Both were something all will remember. It was wonderful to see how many of the family were present and we all regret that others were unable to come.

I am hoping to send you a few photographs soon. Some are very good and those I send you will give you some idea of the yacht and the crowd! I am only sorry that no one thought of taking a photograph from the high launching stand as it would have given you an idea of the numerous boats and yachts on the water. The extraordinary good public address system meant that all could hear what was being said however far away they were and it was obvious to me while speaking that everyone's attention was held.

Right from the beginning we felt this launching ceremony would be the highlight of our Centenary year, and it was!

Yours sincerely,

Ted Stent

H.E.E. Stent
Chairman

Letter from H.E.E. Stent

Thesen & Co (Pty) Ltd
KNYSNA
19th February, 1971

TO ALL SHAREHOLDERS

I feel you may be interested in the notes made by Thelma Findlay and Joan-Marie Paddon about the start of the Rio race.

Thelma says her "blurb" should not be written up but somehow I liked it so much I thought you all ought to see it too. Thelma wanted me to hear her tape recording but unfortunately I was at a meeting when she called, so she wrote it all out for me. She thought Judy's effort was most interesting – Here it is – headed

"Just another Thesen's blurb"

I was one of the 100 000 spectators sitting on a beach chair in brilliant sunshine at the water's edge below the breakwater, these thousands of onlookers were scattered all over the place – docks area, Granger Bay, Mouille Point, Seat Point, and even as far as Camps Bay.

Mona Eastwick deserves all the credit, she went snooping around at Unitie a fortnight before the big day, said she was interested in Albatros II and was a Thesen, and how could she get into the docks on the day of the race. The Secretary very kindly sent her a sticker for her car and an invitation for herself and party to get onto the breakwater. Seven thousand were issued.

She and a friend picked me up at 11.30 a.m. and away we went with folding chairs and coats. Jack reneged on the outing as I thought he would have to walk too far and he agreed.

Sticker up and no trouble to get into the docks, we motored for a very short distance and were made to part our car at a place where buses were waiting to convey people to the breakwater, being the best vantage point overlooking Granger Bay, the start of the race, all very easy and by 12 noon we were enjoying the spectacular scene before us, small craft everywhere. The first yacht to put in an appearance glided gracefully into Granger Bay and believe it or not, it was Albatros II, she anchored about fifty yards in front of us, the crew, all six of them, looked very smart in their red windcheaters. Four and a half hours to go, but not a dull moment. We lunched on chipped potatoes, ice cream and raisins. As the hours passed these 59 little craft made their way to the starting point, a truly beautiful sight. At 4.30 p.m. a puff of smoke from a ship in the bay signaled the start of the longest ocean race in the world. By then a strong south easter was blowing all that the yachts

wanted to help them on their way. The first to cross the line was Stormkaap, followed by Albatros II, the all-girl crew Sprinter, and Voortrekker.

Our homeward journey took us just over an hour, you can imagine the thousands of people making for the buses, the queues were endless, so decided to walk to our car, hundreds did the same, and we looked like crowds of refugees fleeing into the unknown. The walk took us half an hour across very bad ground, made up of railway lines, pipeline, and old ropes, and made more difficult by having to carry our folding chairs, however I loved the day and so did everybody else. A lot has happened since the 16th January and how proud you must all be of Albatros II.

Joan-Marie was slow off the mark but her notes give you some idea of what things at Cape Town were like before the race and at its start. I am sorry she didn't add the fun of chairs being overturned by the wind from the helicopters and also that they had met and given a lift, after the start, to Mrs Eleanor Orpen, wife of the owner of "Qumbu", and Mrs Kershaw, whose husband was navigating that yacht. It was extraordinary how many people met unexpectedly that day!

Race to Rio. Friday. 15th January, 1971.

It rained steadily for the three days before the race. Each morning we said, "Today we will go to see the boats", only to be put off by the weather. Finally on Friday afternoon we braved the elements, Christine, Bridget, Alan and I, to find that large numbers of people had come to the docks for the same purpose.

After searching for a parking place, we walked past piles of timber, across railway lines, among cars and through the crowds to the jetty alongside which the larger yachts were moored. We admired Voortrekker, Bruce Dalling's Jacaranda, Graybeard flying her scarlet Maple Leaf design, Cariad I with her unusual old-styled rigging and then, further down, the President Kruger and other boats of the South African Navy which were involved in the race.

On our return up the jetty who should we meet but Gwen, Chenda and LouJane, who invited us to be the "and party" on their Unitie ticket. Into the Yacht Basin area we went in search of Albatros II, trying to pick her out amongst the flotilla of brave little boats, until eventually we met Lucia, who told us that Albatros II was out swinging the compass. In due course she returned with Stan aboard, coming in under power to pick up her moorings.

We stayed to watch the last-minute loading of bread and other necessities onto the yachts, chatted to Laurel Goodwin, and eventually, somewhat damp, set off home, leaving behind us the exciting bustle of those engaged in preparing for the magnificent enterprise.

Saturday. 16th January, 1971.

Next morning we woke to overcast skies, but there seemed to be signs of the weather clearing. By noon it had become a bright, sunny day. We left the house by 12.30 p.m., taking with us our lunch, deck chairs, transistor radio, etc. and remembering our ticket. From Table Bay Boulevard we could see the sun glinting off the many cars already parked up on Signal Hill. We drove down to the docks where our blue sticker gave us the right of entry. Quite soon after driving in we were stopped, asked to park our car and wait for one of the buses which had been hired to carry spectators to the point of vantage. We climbed into the bus, plus our etceteras, to join a very cheerful crowd, and soon arrived at the breakwater.

Most of the area was already crowded with those who had come before us, but we found a good spot in front of the helicopter station. A few of the yachts were already moored in the bay and one very familiar one was moored just in front of us. Through binoculars we were able to decipher her name "Albatros II of Knysna".

It was now about 2 p.m. and there was quite some time to wait. Then our attention was attracted by a vivid orange flare glowing in the water. It was the start of a demonstration by the NSRI. This was quite exciting as one of the helicopters parked behind us took off to winch a man out of the water using a sling. The versatility of these rather cumbersome craft amazed us for we discovered that they could fly sideways as well as up and down and one, provided with floats, landed in the bay. The highlight of this demonstration was the picking up of three parachutists who had jumped from an aeroplane.

By this stage of the afternoon yachts were beginning to sail out of the harbour. Pen Duick III, Voortrekker, little Sprinter, Ocean Spirit, Howard Davies were amongst those we recognized sailing to and fro. But in front of us Albatros II remained at anchor, her sails ready on deck. It was not until after four that she raised her sails. What a wonderful sight to see all these gallant little ships preparing to set off for Rio. Back and forth they sailed restlessly, while the spectators around us searched for sail numbers with binoculars and identified the various yachts. In the background the long grey hull of President Kruger, carrying various eminent people, was visible.

Ten minutes before starting time and Kim Schippe via the radio announced the gun. We did not hear this but only saw the puff of smoke. He described Signal Hill covered with people and sure enough it resembled a huge hulk encrusted with barnacles. Five minutes to go and the yachts were carefully jockeying for position – less than two minutes and Albatros II, which had been sailing in Pen Duick's wake, crawled slowly along the line just within the starting limits. Finally another puff of smoke indicated that the gun had gone and she swung round to cross the line. With sail set and many brightly coloured spinnakers billowing, the yachts started off on the long haul to Rio.

I am sure that no one who saw the start of the race will forget it, as everyone I've heard from or spoken to was impressed and thrilled by is.

Yours,

Ted Stent

Letter from Ted Stent

Thesen & Co (Pty) Limited
KNYSNA
15th February, 1971

TO ALL SHAREHOLDERS

I have mentioned that Knysna has been suffering from acute "Rio Fever", with occasional severe relapses. One of the symptoms has been poetic inspiration and I am therefore now sending you two poems which have been sent on to us.

The first is by Daphne Gibbins, wife of the honorary organist of St George's Church, Mowbray, which she sent to Hildur under cover of a very pleasant letter, as follows:

ALBATROS II

*Spread your great wings,
Bird of the sea!
Carry our hopes on
To Victory!*

*When the wind fills your sails
May you dance with the gales,
Wave your flag to the stars,
Drop your bow to the whales!
May you scorn the great yachts
And the weights on the scales,
And roll on to Rio,
To Victory.*

*You are more than a sloop –
Just a name in a race,
Just a dot on a map,
Just a number in space –
For you carry our past.
May you win it a place!
You are Knysna itself,
You are History.*

- Daphne Gibbins

The second is by Beatrix Antoinette Foakes, who so many of us remember too as Trixie Lotz when she was young. She sent the poem under cover of a letter to Charlie, in which she told him she is now in her eighty-fourth year. I always remember her really graceful curtsey to Queen Elizabeth at George in 1953, when as Mayoress of Knysna she was presented to the Queen. It was by far the most graceful curtsey of all, that day. Here is the poem.

ALBATROS II

*May she keep her wonderful leading place
In the Cape to Rio exciting race
And skim along on the rollicking seas
With billowing sails in a bracing breeze.*

*May she land in triumph on that far shore
To bring honour and glory as never before
Was brought by a yacht to this country of ours
With its golden shores and wealth of wild flowers.*

*None fairer on earth there ever can be
Than South Africa fair with her sun-drenched sea
Hence if Knysna's yacht brings her worls-wide fame
She'll add glory to Albatros II's name.*

- Beatrix Antoinette Foakes

My next news bulletin will, of course, be full of Albatros II's wonderful achievement.

Yours sincerely

Ted Stent

Letter from Ted Stent

Thesen & Co (Pty) Limited
KNYSNA
22nd February, 1971

TO ALL SHAREHOLDERS

(to be continued)

