

The Officers, Directors and Members of
US SAILING
are pleased to present the
ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL
to
GIOVANNI SOLDINI
FOR THE RESCUE AS FOLLOWS:

For the rescue of Isabelle Autissier in the Southern Ocean on February 16, 1999.

Having been notified by the Around Alone race headquarters that Isabelle was "in trouble," Soldini responded immediately, "I go now." From a position nearly 200 miles away, he reached, then beat, then reached again toward Isabelle's last known position at speeds reaching 20kts in 30 foot seas and winds to 35kts. The positions were updated by communications from race headquarters every hour or so, and in less than 24 hours, Giovanni was approaching the reported position. Turning on his radar, he located the capsized hull of Isabelle's boat, and effected rendezvous. She was below decks, huddled in the cabin, and was not aware of Soldini's presence until he threw a hammer at the hull during a sail-by maneuver. Autissier then emerged, launched her raft, boarded it and was picked off it by Soldini, still in 30 foot seas and gale force winds.

It was a rescue made possible only by modern navigation and communications systems, and by the oldest and finest traditions of those who sail on blue water--to render all aid and assistance to mariners in distress. For his immediate response, his remarkable seamanship, and his undaunted courage, **US SAILING** is pleased to award the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal to Giovanni Soldini.

Ernie Messer
Chairman, Safety-at-Sea Committee

**The Hanson Medal was awarded by US SAILING Safety at Sea
Past Vice President Mason Chrisman at the Custom House in
Charlestown, SC on May 30, 1999.**



US SAILING Past Vice President
Mason Chrisman awarding the
Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal
to Giovanni Soldini on the steps
of the Custom House in
Charleston, SC, May 30, 1999.

Photo by Carolyn S. Griffith, LLC,
One Sayle Road, Charleston, SC
29407

THEIR STORY:

February 15-16, 1999, Around Alone, Southern Ocean, 1900 miles from Cape Horn

From Tragedy to Hero

Giovanni Soldini prior to and during the Around Alone race experienced tragedy.

In a feeder race to Around Alone, four on board Soldini's boat, FILA, were hit by an 80MPH, 50-65 foot wave storm 400 miles off of England. A wave rolled the boat, dismasting it and losing the life of FILA's co-designer and Soldini's best friend, Andrea Romanelli.

During Leg 2 of Around Alone, Soldini warned his competitors of the possible catastrophe around the Kerguelen Islands. He instigated making a new waypoint to guide the fleet around a storm brewing in the treacherous area. At the end of the leg, he said, "It is not there that you win or lose the race, but you can win or lose a friend." This philosophy is integral to this story.

Leg 3 started badly for Soldini, with the loss of more friends. Italian journalist and friend Luciano Nustrini and his wife, Giuliana, took their small vintage plane up to view the start of the race. After flying over Soldini, the small craft crashed into New Zealand's Hauraki Gulf, killing both people. Just days earlier, Soldini had flown with his friend over the same area.

On leg 3, the drama began Monday, February 15, 1999 at 1423 GMT with an electronic scream for help from an emergency beacon aboard Isabelle Autissier's yacht. Race officials weren't too concerned because the beacons often malfunction. "We already had three false alarms in the race," Peter Dunning, the Race Coordinator said. Race officials, however, couldn't contact Autissier. Then they learned Autissier's computer system had conked out. That's when they began to get nervous.

A half-hour later, her shore crew got a call from Autissier in France. She had phoned them, saying she was capsized. Isabelle had just enough time to take refuge inside and send out a distress signal. On the 60-foot yacht PRB, she explained that the boat had been knocked down to 90 degrees, in 20 knots of wind, following an unexpected lurch due to a problem with the boat's autopilot. Autissier acted quickly, "I only had time enough to close the door behind me as I dove into the boat's interior." Next she sealed off the front compartment by sealing the watertight doors.

The capsized occurred about 1,900 nautical miles west of Cape Horn which is an isolated desolate place in the world. In the Pacific Ocean between South America's tip and New Zealand it is as close to the middle of nowhere as you can get. At the time, conditions were 40-mph winds and 40F-degree water.

Race officials notified the fleet of the situation via COMSAT e-mail, and immediately received a satellite phone call from Soldini, who'd been requested to divert for Autissier's position. "He said, 'I'll go right away,'" said race coordinator Pete Dunning. "There was no hesitation." Soldini made the commitment that he was unwilling to lose another friend to the sea. Simply said, 'I go now. Bye.'

Soldini's mark was now 200 miles to the southwest, he put the pedal down and sailed the 200 miles in 24 hours, bucking 35-knot headwinds all the way. In the meantime, Autissier tidied up. "I knew PRB was lost and I knew I had to leave the boat. I want to leave her as a normal boat as far as possible." Autissier was believed to be drifting northeast at about one knot at the time.

"I have 30 knots of wind, and I'm not letting up until I have found Isa," said Soldini, as FILA crashed through 30-foot waves, averaging nearly 20 mph for hours at a time.

When FILA arrived, there was nothing in sight at the EPIRB position, he turned northwest and found PRB in poor

visibility about two miles from the original search sight. As dawn broke Tuesday, Soldini found PRB, floating belly-up, but there was no sign of Autissier. He made two passes close aboard yelling for Isabelle with no response. On the third pass he threw a hammer at PRB's upturned hull and Isabelle appeared. She had been sleeping! She exited by the escape hatch built in to the boat's transom. She hadn't expected a rescue so soon. The hammer was like an alarm clock.

Autissier launched the life raft she had waiting at the escape hatch. She got in and cast off from her yacht, drifting downwind, leaving the escape hatch open, with one important possession in her hand, a passport. Less than 10 minutes after Soldini spotted PRB, he had Autissier on board.

A bittersweet moment occurred when FILA pulled away from PRB bobbing upside down in the steely, undulating seas. The intent was to sink PRB as it was now a hazard to navigation and millions of gallons of water would slowly envelop her and pull her to the ocean floor.

16 Feb 99 14:37:23 GMT

GIOVANNI REPORTED MINUTES AGO TO ISABELLE'S SHORE CREW IN FRANCE THAT HE HAD HER ABOARD FILA AND SHE IS WELL. For added privacy Soldini turned off the boat's satellite phones so that no one, including Race Operations, could bother them while the two relaxed for the first time in 24 hours.

By Tuesday, they were joking with race officials about being low on wine and cheese. As for the future, ``I'm going to take myself a nice cruise," Autissier told. ""Of course I was not expecting to go around Cape Horn on FILA." "Of course I'm very sad about my boat," she said. "But to be alive is better."

Despite efforts to scuttle PRB, however, emergency beacons continued to transmit for days after the incident. The yacht was still afloat. PRB's wreckage, tucked invisibly between towering waves, would be impossible to see by the few vessels transiting that remote stretch of sea.

Maritime agencies issued a warning listing PRB as a hazard. Every few hours PRB's location was announced on a frequency used by all. Clearly she stayed afloat for 10 days. By February 26 the signal was faint: ROC technician Burt Irlich thinks that's when the boat finally slipped to her watery grave. "The ARGOS tracking device could have lasted for 50 more days," "We think it failed because it was submersed in water."

Since parts of the rescue violated race rules, Soldini had to explain his actions to the judges, as well as request time off the course for the side trip in the southern ocean. After more than three hours of closed-door deliberations, an international jury awarded Giovanni Soldini 24 hours as compensation for his rescue of Isabelle Autissier. The decision places Soldini in first place overall in Class I at the end of leg 3.

On his return to Italy after the finish of leg 3, the President of the Italian Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, honored Soldini by presenting the shy young Italian with a medal commemorating the dramatic rescue. Soldini "completed a heroic gesture," said Scalfaro. The award ceremony took place aboard an Italian Navy training ketch, itself a veteran of two circumnavigations.

Soldini, had already received the HMS Hurricane Trophy from the HMS Hurricane Association and the Imperial War Museum of London. The award recognized Soldini's selfless sacrifice in not only rescuing Isabelle Autissier, but also, barely a week later, his diversion to assist race leader Marc Thiercelin (somewhere) after his mast crashed through the deck. Before Soldini arrived to assist a second competitor, Thiercelin jury-rigged and sailed off to the Falkland Islands on his own.