Shosholoza novices amaze yachting's big guns

In a tremendous grand finale to the 2005 America's Cup racing season, South Africa's Team Shosholoza kept up the charge to finish fifth overall in the fiercely fought 12-boat Trapani Louis Vuitton Act 9 which ended off southern Sicily Sunday.
It was the novice South African team's best result so far in the 2005 America's Cup racing season and successfully put them ahead of more than half of the world's best sailing teams - among them the Italian Luna Rossa Challenge which is regarded as one of the top four .

The South African's were on a roll from the outset of the three day, five race event, and went into the final race lying fourth overall behind the giants of the America's Cup - Swiss Team Alinghi, America's BMW Oracle and Emirates Team New Zealand - after clinching two 5ths on Friday and a staggering 3rd place and then a 7th on Saturday.

An eighth place in Sunday's dramatic final race in 16 knot winds and rough seas gave Shosholoza her fifth place overall .

This final race was dominated by a fierce match within a match between BMW Oracle and Cup Defenders Alinghi as BMW needed to put another boat between them to win the event. The final run to the finish was extremely dramatic with the American, Spanish and Swiss boats all very close nearing the finish line. In the event, it was Spain squeezing a nose ahead of BMW ORACLE to win the race. Alinghi was third.

The Spanish win in this final race also meant that she took Shosholoza's coveted fourth place overall . Meanwhile BMW's huge efforts put her on equal points overall with the mighty Alinghi but not enough to dislodge her on the tie break and Alinghi was declared the overall winner of Act 9.

Even so much of the official commentary during the event was focussed on South Africa's Team Shosholoza who was labelled "Most improved team of the season."

"Shosholoza have had an amazing regatta! For a bunch of South African's who hadn't sailed an America's Cup class yacht until 18 months ago - and some not even a boat bigger than 40 feet - this is quite something to end up in the top half of the fleet. They will be able to go back to South Africa with the heads held high. I believe this could be the start of something really big for them," said official race commentator and match racing champion Andy Green.

Earlier in the week the South Africans had scored another personal best in the Trapani Louis Vuitton Act 8 match racing event by taking wins off the French K-Challenge, United Internet Team Germany and China Team during a week of tightly contested two-boat duels.

Team manager and mastermind behind South Africa's maiden bid for the America's Cup, Captain Salvatore Sarno said he was overjoyed with the giant leap the team had made since the first of the season's regattas in Spain when problems in commissioning their new South African designed and built race yacht persisted.

“We got the boat more ready for Sweden and even better for Trapani. Now we are looking fast, slick and professional. This is thanks to sailing manager Paul Standbridge and skipper Geoff Meek who trained these young sailors so well. Above all our crew reflects South Africa – they are humble, but proud and very strong. I am so proud of them.”

“It is rude hard work out there and very, very dangerous. One mistake and someone can get killed.

“I just hope this awakes something in corporate South Africa. We need all the help we can get to build on

these successes. We know we can make the country proud," said Capt Sarno.