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Hong Kong boat prepares for Lake Michigan race

By **JASON RISING** Special to The Sentinel



GETTING READY: Cameron Ward, captain of the racing yacht Beau Geste, prepares his boat for the upcoming Chicago to Mackinac race.

Sentinel/Dan Irving



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The Chicago to Mackinac sailboat race attracts racers from all parts of the country and from around the world.

This year the race has attracted the Beau Geste from Hong Kong and it is docked at Eldean's shipyard on the shores of Lake Macatawa preparing for the 99th annual race on Lake Michigan beginning July 16.

Captain Cameron Ward is working six days a week with three crew members preparing the boat for what he hopes is a good showing in the race.

"If everything goes right with the boat, we have a great shot at winning the race," Ward said, a native of Australia. "It won't be a walk in the park by any means though."

Matthew Eldean has seen several ships dock at the family-owned shipyard over the years, but this one he said has evoked an international buzz.

"It is pretty exciting to have it here," he said. "Who knows? Maybe the owner is over in Hong Kong telling people about us. What great word of mouth."

The Beau Geste, owned by Karl Kwok of Hong Kong, arrived in Holland June 17 by truck from Los Angeles and will leave for Chicago by July 13 to have a few practices before setting sail to Mackinac.

The boat is 52-feet long, with a red stripe around its white hull. Dragon symbols on each side of the boat give it its native allure. The mast of the Transpac52 boat is 75 feet tall.

"It is a very fast boat," Ward said. "Once we get it all together we will open it up 100 percent and see what it can do."

Ward has never sailed on Lake Michigan as he has always sailed on the ocean, but he said he has heard a lot about it from the locals.

"The wind can be anything from five to 50 knots out on the water," Ward said. "The wind will be the biggest factor on how well we do in the race."

The racing crew will gather in Chicago July 13 and will have three days to prepare the crew. Ward said the crew will practice a lot of racing maneuvers to get familiar with each other and simulate the race

The Chicago to Mackinac race is the fifth for the Beau Geste. It has had great success in bigger races around the world.

It is coming off a victory in the Los Angeles to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico race.

In 2003, the Beau Geste won the Transpac race from Los Angeles to Hawaii and finished second last year in a race around New Zealand's north island. It also finished second in the San Francisco big boat race last year.

"We are doing everything we can to accommodate them in preparing for the Mackinac race," Eldean said.

Ward said he has been to hundreds of shipyards around the world, but Eldean's shipyard ranks near the top.

"This is definitely one of the cleanest shipyards I have seen," Ward said. "And it is also the friendliest."

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