

Cornelis van Rietschoten

Swashbuckling Dutch entrepreneur who dominated ocean racing and won the Whitbread Round the World Race twice

Cornelis van Rietschoten, known as Conny, was Holland's most famous yachtsman. He dominated ocean racing during the late 1970s and early 1980s, becoming the only skipper to win twice the British-run Whitbread Round the World yacht race, the forerunner to today's Volvo Ocean Race.

A prosperous businessman in search of a fresh challenge, he channelled his money and management skills into his two champion *Flyer* yachts. In one remarkable episode during his second Whitbread race in 1981-82 the shy but fiercely competitive Dutchman displayed the steely depths of his character. Five days out of Cape Town in strong winds in the Southern Ocean and still a month from Auckland he had a heart attack. Neck-and-neck with the Kiwi yacht *Ceramco* he swore his crew to secrecy, even though *Ceramco* had a cardiologist in her crew and was just a few miles astern.

"The critical period after a heart attack is always the first 24-36 hours, and the nearest port [Fremantle, Australia] was ten days away," van Rietschoten recounted later. "*Ceramco* was already breathing down our necks. If they had known that I had a health problem,

He lost dozens of bottles of champagne betting with his rival skippers

they would have pushed their boat even harder. When you die at sea, you are buried over the side. If that happened, the *Ceramco* boys might then have spotted me drifting by... and that, I was determined, would be the only thing they would see or hear from *Flyer* on the matter!"

The nervous junior doctor on board *Flyer* was charged with his care —not even van Rietschoten's own wife knew until some time later. The Dutchman was soon up working again. In Auckland he was put on medication by a cardiologist, enjoyed a brief respite and then plunged on to the next and most arduous leg to Argentina, apparently suffering no long-term effects.

Flyer won the Cape Town-Auckland stage by nine hours, but from there on the two yachts were constantly trading places. Halfway across the Pacific the crews were within sight of each other and rounded Cape Horn in close company. *Ceramco*'s skipper liked to bet with van Rietschoten on almost any outcome within the race, and, being better at setting wagers, would collect countless bottles of champagne at the end of each leg. However, van Rietschoten eventually got even, saying over the radio as the pair closed on Cape Horn: "Peter, would you like me to report to the world that *Ceramco* beat *Flyer* round?" "That would be very nice,"



Van Rietschoten at the helm in the Southern Ocean; below, in Auckland after winning the Whitbread leg from Cape Town



came the reply. "Well, that will cost you 25 bottles of bubbly," van Rietschoten chuckled. There was no reply, and to this day, the *Flyer* and *Ceramco* crews still argue over which boat was first.

Van Rietschoten finished first in Portsmouth, to take line honours, and when the French yacht *Charles Heidsieck III*, their nearest rival on handicap, was becalmed near the Azores, *Flyer* became the first and only yacht in the history of the race to scoop both line and handicap honours. The crew also set two world records: the fastest noon to noon run of 327 miles, and the fastest circumnavigation, in 120 days.

It was not until 1977 that the world of

sailing really got to know about this Dutchman. At 45 he had retired from active business and was looking for new challenges. The first Whitbread Race in 1973 fitted the bill.

His approach changed the sport. He had money and professionalism, unlike the gung-ho amateurs at the time. He still saw himself as an amateur, but his achievements were not matched until the New Zealander Peter Blake also swept all before him with *Steinlager 2* a decade later.

It is commonplace now, but van Rietschoten was the first skipper to undertake extensive trialling and crew training before the race, and invested his money wisely, funding research to improve crew clothing, rigs and the first computerised forecasting techniques.

His aim was to find raw young sailors and train them to race the way he wanted. No one was paid while at sea; they were given only \$50 a week spending money in port and van Rietschoten laid down strict rules (no discussion of religion or politics on board and no criticism of the food). To his credit, many of his crew went on to greatness in their fields. Grant Dalton, head of New Zealand's America's Cup campaign, began as a sailmaker aboard the second *Flyer*.

Before his first Whitbread race van Rietschoten and his crew embarked on a double Atlantic crossing, and won the

returning transatlantic race before racing around the world from Portsmouth and back to win on handicap by a huge 59-hour margin. For his second campaign in 1981-82 he returned with the second of his *Flyer* yachts, this time a purpose-built 76ft maxi-sloop.

In his huge house in the Algarve where he owned more than 20 miles of coastline, he created an office, the *Flyer* room, filled with memorabilia, photographs and models.

Cornelis van Rietschoten was introduced to sailing at 3, joining his father, Jan Jacob, aboard the family's 12-metre yacht *Copeja*, in races run by the Royal Maas Yacht Club in Rotterdam.

His childhood was disrupted by the Second World War. He spent much of it hidden by his mother in a secret room in the attic of the family home in Rotterdam. His father was held, like many prominent people, as a hostage in the hope of forestalling attempts by the Dutch Resistance movement to sabotage vessels being fitted out at the family's shipyard. Jan Jacob was spared but his friend Willem Ruys, head of the shipping line Rotterdam Lloyd, was summarily shot after the cruise ship that van Rietschoten's company was completing, was sabotaged. Van Rietschoten's two brothers were also killed, one while parachuting into the Netherlands from the UK as part of the

Resistance movement; the other while attempting to rescue the skipper of a Rhine barge he was crewing on during the first Allied 1,000-bomber raid on Duisburg.

These experiences left a deep mark on van Rietschoten's character and reinforced his burning desire to succeed with every challenge. A keen field sportsman, he enjoyed shooting and fishing, and was a scratch golfer.

After the war he moved to England to study engineering. A win on the football pools allowed him to buy the Dragon-class 29ft keelboat *Gerda* with a friend, and it was aboard this small boat that he developed a taste for long-distance sailing. Their first voyage was from the Clyde to Cowes. Their second, in 1948, was from Cowes, across the North Sea to Arendal, Norway, to compete in that year's Dragon Gold Cup world championship. They didn't win, but Crown Prince Olaf of Norway proclaimed the two *Gerda* crew the best sailors at the regatta for sailing the longest distance to take part.

While developing a successful business career, first in pharmaceuticals, and later transforming the family electrical engineering business into a multinational, van Rietschoten continued sailing, competing in several North Sea, Fastnet and Santander races.

Before his Whitbread exploits, van Rietschoten, whose political views were unabashedly rightwing, developed a championship golf course near his Algarve home, only to see the land confiscated when Portugal briefly fell to a Communist coup in the early 1970s. Convinced that the regime would fail, van Rietschoten bought out his partners, and waited. When the regime did collapse in 1974, he recouped his money and used some of it to fund his first Whitbread campaign.

He was even luckier when he and his party of hunters were held captive during a safari shoot in Zaire. Tied up for three days, van Rietschoten was eventually released with his shooting friends. Six other hunters were less fortunate. They were found in shallow graves a week earlier. He never went on safari again, and gave his guns away. He stopped racing in 1982. A trophy named after him is awarded annually to the best Dutch competition sailor.

Conny's wife, Inger, died in 2004, and he is survived by their one daughter and three sons. He rarely spoke about the past with his family, and his four children have careers in IT, banking and, in one case, farming in France. His youngest son, also Cornelis, lives in the UK and keeps a yacht in Shoreham-by-Sea.

Cornelis van Rietschoten, entrepreneur and champion ocean racer, was born on March 23, 1926. He died after a stroke on December 17, 2013, aged 87

Audrey Totter

Actress who played femmes fatales, tough-talking dames and 'bad girls'

With her powerfully expressive arching eyebrows, pursed lips and disdainful stare, Audrey Totter epitomised the femme fatale of film noir in the 1940s and early 1950s.

In the 1946 masterpiece *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, she tantalises the fall guy John Garfield with racy banter when he stops to help her after her car breaks down.

She had a bigger role the following year in *Lady in the Lake* as the publishing executive who hires the detective Philip Marlowe (Robert Montgomery). The film is notable for being shot from

Marlowe's point of view. Totter, who was born in Joliet, Illinois, in 1917, also played more virtuous roles, but said that "bad girls" were more fun to play.

One of her most memorable "bad girls" was the philandering wife in *Tension* (1950). She walks out on her hard-working husband for a rich lover. Humiliated and beaten up by his latest rival, the husband plots his revenge, but his wife kills her lover and sets up the hapless husband as prime suspect.

Totter continued to act into the 1980s, but as the tough-talking dame

roles fell out of fashion she worked mostly in television. She appeared in several TV series, including the long-running CBS show *Medical Center*. Her last role was in an episode of *Murder, She Wrote*, in 1987.

Her husband, Leo Fred, a medical academic at UCLA School of Medicine, predeceased her. She is survived by their daughter, and a grand-daughter, Eden Trotter.

Audrey Totter, actress, was born on December 20, 1917. She died December 12, 2013, aged 95



Totter in *Lady in the Lake* (1947), the innovative film adaptation of Raymond Chandler's novel. She starred opposite Robert Montgomery who directed and played the hard-boiled private dick Phillip Marlowe