



Old man of the sea



■ Les Harper, on duty.

One of the most recognisable figures in the Lexus of Adelaide Bluewater Classic's 59-year history is volunteer coastguard Les Harper, of Stansbury. At 90, he is still involved in the event and will once again man the radio on the eastern seaboard for the start of this year's race this Friday, February 22, at Outer Harbour.

Every year, volunteers from the Coast Guard and Coast Patrol take their stations and provide an ear to the many crews taking part in the 156 nautical mile race from Adelaide to Port Lincoln.

Les has been a coastguard for 24 years, during which time he has monitored the radio for the Bluewater Classic regularly. He works from his radio

base at Oyster Bay where he will be ready for duty from 6am on Friday of the race.

He conducts radio checks with the yachts before their departure at 3pm to make sure all their equipment is working and then makes two more scheduled radio contacts with them once the race is underway.

This year it looks as though the event will be the biggest yet with at least 90 yachts scheduled to take part, all of which Les will have to be in contact with.

"The fact of the matter is there are about eight to 15 people per boat and that means somewhere between 640 and 1200 lives are at stake," says Les. "My job is to provide assistance when required and to make sure

no catastrophes take place.

"Thankfully, the worst thing I've had to deal with is a broken mast. Nothing traumatic."

Les works through the night and all the next day to "make sure the stragglers get there".

"I think the Bluewater Classic is a marvellous event. It's better than the Sydney to Hobart because for one it's here and secondly it's our State's big classic and we should all be proud of it."

Les is a retired aviation technical officer with an enormous love of the sea and yachting. He is a Foundation Member at the Cruising Yacht Club of South Australia (CYCSA) and to this day he and his wife, Kate, still have a boat that they use for leisure.

After nearly seven years of war service, Les joined the Department of Civil Aviation and served for 31 years in the engineering branch throughout South Australia and the Northern Territory. When he retired, he moved to Stansbury where he had built a house with Kate.

"Les's membership at the CYCSA and his involvement with the Lexus of Adelaide Bluewater Classic has made him one of the most enduring and identifiable faces in SA's yachting community," Lexus of Adelaide Bluewater Classic Event Coordinator Matt Gryst says. "His passion and commitment to yachting in our State is admired by many.

"He has many colourful tales to tell about what he has seen and done over the years. But to all who listen to their marine radios, he is 'Coastguard Oyster Bay'."