

# Paralysed sailor takes on oceans by remote control

**Kevin Wheatley**

A BRITISH entrepreneur, paralysed in a skiing accident, is building a yacht which he could sail round the world in his wheelchair. Although disabled people have navigated the oceans, none is believed to have been as severely impaired as Mike Browne, a self-confessed adrenaline junkie.

The custom-built 58ft catamaran will have a device similar to a television remote control to operate the sails. There will be wheelchair hoists, lifts and winches to allow Browne, 52, full mobility on board.

"It's not the intention to sail solo round the world, although the boat is designed to do that," said Browne, who owns the Snow and Rock chain of skiing and mountaineering stores. "But if you're two-handed in mid-Atlantic and the other guy goes overboard, it would be nice to be able to sail back for him rather than sit there on your own and wait to die of thirst."

Nic Bailey, who has designed racing catamarans and who developed the London Eye's passenger pods, is realising Browne's dream.

"It was Mike's brief that everything aboard be oper-

able by him," said Bailey from his office in Dartmouth, Devon. "He also demanded a boat that was fast and looked good. A lot of cruising catamarans aren't exactly the height of elegance."

The young Browne was obsessed by mountaineering and left a potential career in civil engineering to climb full-time. He broke his back eight years ago when he skied off a 150ft Alpine precipice.

When he left Stoke Mandeville hospital he found sailing could still thrill him. He sailed for Britain in last year's Sydney Paralympics and was placed seventh.

"It's going to be a boat that can take me as far north as the Arctic circle and then to every point of the compass," said Browne, who is divorced.

"It's as close as I can get to replacing the thrill of exploration and discovery, which is what I loved about mountaineering."

Work has started on the vessel and is unlikely to leave Browne with much change from £750,000.

Until it is launched next summer, Browne will polish his multihull skills in his 27ft racing catamaran Legless. "Half of me wants to call the new one Legless Again, but I'm not sure," he laughed.

