

Whisky festival date for sailing legend

■ By **CHRIS SAUNDERSON**

A LEGENDARY figure from the world of sailing will be the special guest at the opening dinner of the Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival later this month.

Sir Robin Knox-Johnston sailed into the history books on April 22, 1969, when he became the first man to sail single-handed and non-stop around the world.

It took him 312 days to complete the journey in his 32-foot teak ketch, 'Suhaili', in the Sunday Times Golden Globe Race, which began in Falmouth on June 14, 1968.

He was the only one of nine competitors who started the race to complete the gruelling challenge.

He will be the guest speaker at Benromach Distillery on Thursday, April 29. Sir Robin, who is in the International Sailing Federation's hall of fame, is a global ambassador for the Speyside malt whisky produced at the Forres distillery.

Sir Robin wanted to give ordinary people the chance to follow in his footsteps and race around the world under sail, and in order to achieve this goal, he set up the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race. More than 2,000 people have taken on the challenge since the first Clipper Race in 1996, and Benromach is a major sponsor of the event.

The winners of the 2010 Spirit of Speyside Whisky awards, photographic competition and cocktail competition will be honoured at the dinner, which will be attended by 300 people.

The cocktail competition was judged last Friday in the malt library at the Knockomie Hotel in Forres, which sponsored the event along with the UK Bartenders Guild.

The basis for all the cocktails had to be the Spirit of Speyside Blended Malt Whisky, which contains 33 Speyside malts, and the brief was for a refreshing long drink.

All cocktails were made to recipe by Regis Lemaitre, UKBG area chairman, who closely followed the instructions on the submissions.

The tasting panel consisted of Blair Bowman, secretary of the Aberdeen University Malt Whisky Society; Ewen Macintosh, whisky supply manager for Gordon and Macphail; Penny Ellis, proprietor of the Knockomie Hotel, and Mr Lemaitre.

The winner was Dan Thomson of Zafferano in London with his cocktail 'Gallus Glen', who will be invited to attend the official opening dinner. The winning cocktail will be served as a welcome drink.

Mr Lemaitre, who used to work at the Gleneagles Hotel and the Old Course Hotel at St Andrews, and is now a freelance bartender trainer, revealed the secret to a good whisky cocktail.

"Don't make them too complicated," he said. "If you put in five ingredients, which generally go into a cocktail, you could end up with too many



It's all in the mix.....Judges Regis Lemaitre, of the UK Bartenders Guild, and Penny Ellis, of the Knockomie Hotel, prepare to sample some of the entries in the Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival's cocktail competition. NS

contrasting flavours and not enough of the base spirit."

Among the highlights of the five-day festival will be a community cavalcade on Sunday, May 2 in Forres and Grantown on Spey.

The Spirit of Speyside Festival Flag will be hoisted at the opening dinner and remain there until Sunday, May 2, when it will start its journey to Glenfarclas, keepers of the flag until next year's festival. The journey will include two mounted cavalcades parading through Forres and Grantown-on-Spey and a mountain biking trip along the Dava Way.

On Monday, May 3, the next leg of the journey will be by canoe trip along the River Spey.

"This is where festival visitors can help carry the festival flag across Speyside, while exploring the area at the river's pace. This part of the flag journey celebrates the importance of the River Spey, its people, its history and its reputation as one of the most famous salmon fishing rivers in the world," said festival manager Pamela Looper. Places can be booked on this canoe journey through the festival website.

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