



Rick Tomlinson/Volvo Ocean Race

Wednesday 05 November 2008 12:30 GMT

Ericsson 3 took a large step towards achieving their potential by replacing their non-compliant keel today.

The team were penalised to the tune of one point per in-port race, one for each scoring gate and two for every leg finish as a result of a pre-race verdict by the International Jury, who ruled in Alicante that the team's keel fin did not meet race rules.

It has so far cost the team four points – meaning they occupy sixth on the leaderboard with five points instead of fifth – but now that bill will stop growing.

"It's good that this team can now start getting full points," said Richard Brisius, Ericsson Racing Team's managing director. "They are a very good team and can do well in this race."

In Alicante Brisius suggested the keel would be fitted in either Cape Town or India, but a quick turnaround at the manufacturer's base in northern Italy has seen the task completed well ahead of schedule.

"We knew it was going to be produced in this stopover, but we didn't think we would get it until four days before the start," Aksel Magdahl, the team navigator, revealed. "They have done a great job to get it here."

The keel arrived in Cape Town on Sunday, one day before the team crossed the finish line in third place. Skipper Anders Lewander and his team only heard the news when Brisius informed them moments after the boat arrived.

The team's shore manager Herve LeQuillec said that the Nordic team had not sustained any major damage on the 6,500-nautical mile first leg from Spain and the boat will be back on the water next Tuesday or Wednesday.

"The biggest job is to fit the keel and then there is just housekeeping on the boat," he said. "Both Ericsson 3 and 4 are in good shape."

Eventful first leg

Meanwhile, Green Dragon shore boss Johnny Smullen expects his team's battered boat to be back on the water by Sunday.

The Chinese-Irish team had an eventful first leg to Cape Town, hitting a submerged object, tearing a couple of sails and damaging the pulpit at the bow en route to a fourth-placed finish.

The late-night collision with an unidentified object – Smullen has ruled out a stray container from his list of suspects – caused damage to the keel fairing (see latest images) and both daggerboard covers, but Smullen expects the repairs to be completed over the coming days.

He said: "We are on it already and, assuming the weather stays nice enough for us to work, we should be back on the water this Sunday."

The team only discovered the extent of the damage when the boat was hauled from the water on Tuesday morning.

"Structurally it's fine, it's just the fairing," Smullen said. "The leading edge of the keel, made of carbon and foam, got smashed and it left an unfavourable profile. That's what cost us in terms of speed. It would have the same effect, if a Formula One car lost all its wings and the nose.

"We also lost the daggerboard cover. We partially lost it on one side (port) and completely on the other (starboard).

"Thankfully, we were prepared for it. As a shore team we anticipated hitting stuff so we had a fairing mould already made up before the boat came in. We guessed what was going on and then confirmed it. We are already milling it in."

Mystery still surrounds the culprit of the damage. Smullen said: "Something as small – I say that but they can be up to 200 pounds – as a sunfish, or a tree or log. I don't think it was a container as there are no other marks on the hull. If it was something huge it would have taken out our rudders and left a lot of marks in the process."

Work is also underway to fix the pulpit on the bow. "It was pretty twisted and we bent a staunchion. That's all getting straightened up and fixed.

"Other than that, there's not a lot else that needs work. The panel that covers the head