

ON THE WATER with Candice Reed

America's Cup racing comes back to the Viaduct (after a fashion)

Russell Coutts, Dean Barker and some of the great names of America's Cup yachting will compete on Waitemata Harbour from tomorrow for a special trophy created by sponsor Louis Vuitton.

Team NZ will host nine teams from nine countries — including six of the major America's Cup syndicates — in the Pacific Series.

"We are delighted at the overwhelming response to our

concept of a friendly series for top-level international teams," says Yves Carcelle, chairman of Louis Vuitton.

"We started with the hope six teams would race, and to attract 10 top entries at such short notice is a great achievement. This will be the most outstanding gathering of international sailing teams since the Louis Vuitton Cup in Auckland in 2003."

Late last year, the then Government contributed \$750,000 to support the regatta. The funds came from the Government's \$36 million trade and tourism allocation for Team NZ's build-up to the next America's Cup.

During the series crews will take turns racing one-on-one in New Zealand's NZL 92 and NZL 84, and BMW Oracle Racing's USA 87 and USA 98. The two American boats

were unloaded just before Christmas and 30 Kiwi and American shore crew worked through the holiday to prepare them for racing.

Challengers include Luna Rossa (Italy), winner of the 2000 Louis Vuitton Cup and semifinalist in Valencia; France's K-Challenge; Team Origin from Britain; South Africa's Team Shosholoza; Damiani Italia, a new team from Circolo-

Canottieri Aniene and Club Canottieri Roggero di Lauria, two of Italy's oldest yacht clubs; and the recently-formed Greek Challenge.

There will be six races off North Head each day, the courses designed for great spectator viewing from shore or afloat. A daily draw will decide which yacht competing teams will sail that day.

■ Details: www.sail-world.com