

# Almost French

See some of the world's rarest and smallest dolphins in Akaroa, New Zealand's only French settlement. Story by LEE ATKINSON.

**H**ector the Cairn Terrier is going crazy. Two minutes ago he was quietly napping between the feet of one of the passengers but now he is acting like a dog possessed. Running around in circles and yapping madly at his reflection in the water, leaning so far overboard that one can only hope his specially designed lifejacket will keep him afloat when he falls in,

which it looks like he will any moment.

Suddenly, as if sung from the deep by his insistent barking, five magnificent Hector's dolphins leap out of the water in front of him, and he triumphantly retreats to the back of the boat, his job done. While the rest of New Zealand might be famous for its sheep dogs, aboard the catamaran, Akaroa Dolphin, this dog earns his

biscuits by spotting dolphins.

The Akaroa Dolphin runs daily dolphin watching tours around Akaroa Harbour, one of two drowned volcanic craters which make up the rocky finger of land that is the Banks Peninsula, around 85 kilometres from Christchurch, and home to the world's rarest and smallest dolphin, the Hector's dolphin. According to the WWF



(World Wildlife Fund) there are only 7,381 Hector's dolphins left in the world and they are only found off the coasts of New Zealand, with the biggest populations found in the Akaroa area. Growing to just 1.4 metres long and weighing less than 50kg, these small but pretty dolphins are solidly built with a gently sloping snout and unique rounded dorsal fin. With their distinctive white bellies and grey-black bodies, complete with white racing stripes along their sides, they are very different to other dolphins found in and around southern Pacific waters.

Despite their rarity, on our two-hour cruise we see dozens of dolphins, leaping high into the water around us and surfing the bow wave of the catamaran. We also see a large colony of fur seals basking in the sun on an outcrop of volcanic rocks as well as little blue penguins, marine salmon and

