

Irish go all out to build ties in Asia

THE Irish Business Association is one of the few non-commercial organisations to take full advantage of the networking opportunities made possible by the Volvo Ocean Race Singapore stop-over.

Despite the presence of much bigger teams from larger countries, Saturday was all about the Irish. The association had taken the initiative to organise an Ireland-themed day during the stopover. The adopted team was the *Green Dragon* team, an Irish-Chinese collaborative effort.

The key event of the day was a networking dinner hosted by the association with *Green Dragon* skipper

Ian Walker and OCBC director Colm McCarthy speaking on the topic "Managing a crew through challenging waters". Other events, such as Irish dancing performances and jam sessions, took place throughout the day.

Apart from the talk by speakers at the top of their game in the sailing and banking worlds respectively, the event also provided an opportunity to highlight the connections between Ireland and Asia in business and, in this case, sport.

The *Green Dragon* team has sponsors from both Ireland and China. The boat itself was built in China with

components coming from all over the world before being finally assembled in Ireland. The boat is therefore a showcase for the opportunities that abound in the corporate and cultural spheres between Ireland and this part of the world.

Among those taking advantage of the opportunities at the event was Ronald Bolger, chairman of Fine Grain Property, an Irish private equity firm which is 65 per cent owned by Ireland-based investors with the remaining stake being Singapore-held. Fine Grain is behind the Seven Hundred Beach project on Beach Road.

"It's been a fantastic



DAVID BRANIGAN/OCEANSPORT

Making connections: (from left) Ireland's ambassador to Singapore Richard O'Brien, Mr Walker, Mr McCarthy and Mr Bolger

day," said Mr Bolger, who is also Singapore's honorary consul-general to Ireland, with obvious pride as Irish musicians played in the background.

"Irish companies coming into South-east Asia and China tend to use Singa-

pore as the springboard because it is very user-friendly," he added. "Building up relationships with people that you can do business with from a long-term point of view is very much a part of the networking that is done at occasions like this."