

### Charleston to Bermuda Race Leader Halfway There on Day 3

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA (May 20, 2007)—As the hours of Sunday wore on, the Open 50 *Gryphon Solo* continued to lead the rest of the 18-boat fleet bound for Bermuda on the open Atlantic. As of the 2:00 p.m. position update, her speed had slowed somewhat—to an average of 6.5 knots—but she was continuing to distance herself from her competitors by employing a combination of savvy weather interpretation and superior boat speed. Her skipper, New Zealander Hugh Piggin, reported that this ‘round-the-world racing vessel had crossed the halfway point earlier Sunday morning, and was steering a heading almost directly at Bermuda. According to the iBoatTrack data available online via the event’s website, Piggin and his crew were over 60 miles ahead of the second-place boat, Mark Weber’s Swan 56 *Nova*, as of Sunday afternoon.

In an e-mail sent early Sunday, Piggin wrote: “*Gryphon Solo* is making 10.5 knots and is pointed at Bermuda. Wahoo! The last 24 hours were a lot more comfortable than the first 20. With flatter seas and a good sailing angle, we have made good progress and are now at the halfway mark. At first light yesterday, we shook out the two reefs we had overnight and changed from the staysail to the big jib in the moderating pressure. We pointed the boat east-southeast and kept her reaching all day as the weather info suggested we needed to be south to skirt around a large (wind) hole associated with the high pressure we are in. The little red rocket really loves reaching at 90 degrees to the true wind angle and we can swing the keel all the way over and power her right up. The steady sailing allowed us all to catch up on some rest and nutrition that was lost on the first night. The updated weather information we are now getting suggests that the wind hole will form later than we first thought, so we have turned north toward Bermuda hoping that the hotter sailing angle will get us down the track fast enough to stay in breeze ahead of the hole. Our fingers are crossed and we’re hoping that the forecast is right.”

Charleston sailor Susan Ford, who is also racing on board *Gryphon Solo*, called in at 1:30 p.m. to say that the winds had lightened in their vicinity, but the boat was nonetheless making relatively steady progress toward Bermuda. “We’re a little slow, now. The wind dropped out around 10:00 a.m. today, but it had been around 12 knots from the north, and up until that point we were averaging about 8 knots. Now we’re making about 6.5 over the ground.” Ford related that the sea conditions were beautiful, saying that the skies were clear with some clouds on the horizon.

“We haven’t seen anything except one large cargo ship, but we’re starting to see a few long-tail birds—the tropic birds from Bermuda. It’s been pretty pleasant since the Gulf Stream,” she added, “and we haven’t had to tack or jibe the boat since the Charleston Harbor jetties, which is pretty amazing.”

*Gryphon Solo*’s early southeasterly strategy seems to be the dominant approach among the fleet as eight other boats are following suit, including Richard Muenow’s Brewer 44 *Ageless Adventure*. However, Muenow’s boat is so far south of the rhumbline (120 miles as of 2:00 p.m. Sunday) that casual observers might think he is heading for the Bahamas.

The most recent position updates indicated that the boat was making 1.3 knots toward the south-southwest.

Elsewhere on the course, a cluster of entries have opted for a more northerly strategy and they appear to have paid a steep price for that decision because none of them were posted speeds greater than 3 knots for much of the morning. Among these boats is *E's Alee*, the Ocean Sailing Academy's Hylas 45, with five paying student sailors on board (along with two instructors and correspondent Will Haynie). Positioned just north of the rhumbline, the boat was still 570 miles out from the finish mid Sunday afternoon, but her speed had improved and she was making over 6 knots with 15-knot winds out of the west. Late Saturday afternoon, Haynie filed an update with his editor at the Post & Courier and wrote that the boat's Gulf Stream passage was somewhat hairy. He said that the winds peaked at 30 knots, and he termed it a "wild ride with heavy seas breaking over the bow" of the boat.

Also among this northerly group is Robert Aldred's Beneteau 361 *Dreamscape*, the only entry from Bermuda and the smallest boat in the fleet. Charleston-based delivery captain Dan Valoppi is skippering the boat and so far he's managed to outperform several larger rivals including *E's Alee*. As of the 2:00 p.m. position report today, he and his two crew (Aldred and his son) were cruising along at almost 5 knots with 546 miles still to go to the finish. At the time, they were 23 miles in front of *E's Alee* and roughly 30 miles in front of Jack Wood's Island Packet 40 *Zippity Do Dah*.

Another strong performer in the fleet is Bill Hanckel's J/120 *EmOcean*, which as of the 2:00 p.m. position report today was less than 100 miles astern of *Gryphon Solo*. The 40-footer was averaging almost just over 4 knots at the time, on a northeasterly heading. Her position was strong enough to put the boat atop the leaderboard in Spinnaker Class A, with *Nova* in second. (Rankings are a projection of finish times based on the boats' average performance, factoring in their respective PHRF ratings.) Though no recent calls have come in from the boat, navigator Brian Swan did check in early on Saturday. He related that the Gulf Stream had been "nasty," but once through that zone, he said the conditions were sunny and relatively smooth.

From the nav station on board Steve Lesniak's Beneteau 510 *Celadon*, Hamilton Foster called in just before noon on Sunday to relate that he and his fellow crew were doing well, and generally taking it easy given the moderate conditions. "We've essentially been on the same port tack since leaving the jetties, but it's been quite light recently. In fact, some time last night the wind completely died. At one stage we had all our sails down. Right now we've got a full mainsail up and we're trying to get the asymmetrical spinnaker flying. We're making about a half knot of speed."

Foster related that the crew had been making the most of the light winds. "We've caught two fish, a barracuda and a bonita, and we've had to avoid some flying fish that have landed on deck. But morale on board is pretty good, and we're taking advantage of these calm conditions to focus on nourishing ourselves. We had lasagna yesterday and it's tacos this afternoon."

Not long after he called, the winds began to fill in from the west for *Celadon* and the boats around her. As of the 2:00 p.m. position update, she was making 3 knots with 539 miles still to go.

According to NOAA's Atlantic Surface Analysis, a high pressure system will continue to gradually move over the southeastern and mid-Atlantic coasts, chasing the C2B fleet. The winds for most of the fleet will be westerly. For those boats south of the rhumbline, the breezes should remain light.

Anyone interested in following the progress of the C2B fleet can track the boats by logging on to the event's website [www.charlestantobermuda.com](http://www.charlestantobermuda.com) and clicking on the [iboatrack.com](http://iboatrack.com) link. Daily updates will also be posted on the site.

The Charleston to Bermuda Race is sponsored by Bermuda Tourism, Gosling's Black Seal Rum, the Fairmont Hamilton Princess, the Charleston Harbor Resort, Bennett-Hofford, and Charleston Boatworks. The event receives critical support from The Royal Bermuda Yacht Club. The race is open to every seaworthy boat 30 feet and longer. Race committee duties for the race are managed by the Charleston Ocean Racing Association.

The owner and organizing authority for the Charleston to Bermuda Race is the South Carolina Maritime Foundation (SCMF). SCMF is a nonprofit 501c3 organization with a mission to offer a unique educational platform for students, encouraging responsibility, teamwork, and other attributes necessary to become future leaders. Other programs include construction of a tall ship, the Spirit of South Carolina, Charleston Race Week, Tall Ships® Charleston and the Charleston Maritime Festival. Support the Spirit at [www.scmaritime.org](http://www.scmaritime.org).

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