

Leaders Close on Bermuda as Winds Return

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA (May 22, 2007)—The rich get richer, as the saying goes, and that appears to be the case among the 15 boats still competing in the Charleston to Bermuda Race. Though light and variable winds affected most of the fleet for much of Monday, Zephyrus (the Greek god of the western wind) favored the leaders and visited them with moderately stronger breezes near the end of the day and through the night. These marginal increases in velocity were enough to cheer a few crews, among them Hugh Piggin, Susan Ford, Hank Hofford, and Jeffrey Wargo on board the Open 50 *Gryphon Solo*, who have thus far managed to maintain a comfortable if not commanding margin over their closest rivals—Bill Hanckel’s J/120 *EmOcean* and Buddy Darby’s Sweden 70 *Luna Danns*. As of the 10:00 a.m. position update today, the 50 was nearly 50 miles ahead of the Sweden 70, with the J/120 five miles further back.

At that time, *Gryphon Solo* was sailing along on a port tack, almost directly at her next waypoint-Bermuda. Skipper Piggin wrote in an e-mail this morning that the winds solidified to 10 knots at about 3:00 a.m. from the north-northwest. He said the crew was happy to finally have some consistent breeze and be closing on the finish, particularly since their rivals to the north had been experiencing better winds all night and weren’t far behind. The iBoatTrack projection indicates that *Gryphon Solo* should finish tonight around 11:00 p.m.

Young Will Hanckel and his team aboard *EmOcean* spent the latter half of Monday sailing in slightly stronger breezes, and they evidently took advantage of the boat’s arsenal of asymmetrical spinnakers. By late Monday night, they had sailed well enough to overtake Darby and his crew, who spent part of Monday struggling in lighter winds after choosing a more southerly route for about 40 miles. Both these boats had closed the distance between themselves and the leader in the past 36 hours.

If there was great concern about their rivals among the crew on board *Gryphon Solo*, it wasn’t evident in Susan Ford’s 5:00 p.m. call yesterday. In fact, Ford, whose daughter Anna is racing on *EmOcean*, said she was thrilled at how well the team on board the J/120 had been performing.

A three-time Charleston to Bermuda Race veteran, Ford related that the seas at the time were very calm—no more than a foot high, making it easy for the 50 footer to take advantage of its Code 0 headsail and ratchet up the speed gauge to 10, sometimes 11, knots. She added that one of *Gryphon Solo*’s rudders had struck an object in the water late in the day on Sunday. “We’re really not sure what it was, but we’ll be checking it out once we get to the dock. Other than that it’s beautiful out here and we’re enjoying the race and eating well, of course.”

Less than 30 miles astern of *Luna Danns* and *EmOcean*, a trio of entries continues to wage a close battle for second-place honors among the boats in Class B. Beezer Molton’s J/120 *Don Quijote*, Kevin Hogan’s C&C 44 *Kintaro*, and David Guggenheim’s Beneteau 40.7 *Piakea* have remained in close proximity with one another for much of the race. As

of the mid-morning update today, *Don Quijote* maintained a meager lead of just 8 miles over both her rivals.

Molton made a call to shore late on Monday afternoon and said that all was well on board *Don Quixote*. “We’re pushing hard for Bermuda, trying to hold a course of about 120 degrees. We’re making about 8.5 knots right now and the boat is behaving beautifully. We made a decision earlier to go north for pressure. We don’t know if it’s the right call yet. If it works out, we think we’ll arrive in Bermuda Wed. morning early.” He said the team had caught a couple of tuna later in the day on Saturday, which did a lot to brighten the morale on board after what he called a “tough first night in the Gulf Stream.”

But as the leaders maintained solid progress toward Bermuda, their brethren at the back of the fleet continued to struggle with lighter winds, equating to minimal progress down the track. Eddie Evans’ Beneteau 38.6 *Naut on Call*, the last place boat as of today’s 10:00 a.m. update, was making less than 2 knots at the time and had yet to cross the halfway point to Bermuda. And Glen McIntosh’s team on board the well-appointed Beneteau 57 *Latitude Adjustment II* was similarly plagued by a lack of wind. It takes more than 6 knots of breeze to get this 47,000-pound boat moving, but as of the mid-morning update today, her iBoatTrack transponder was registering just 8 knots of wind. The same data showed that team McIntosh still had 412 miles to sail to the finish.

Some 25 miles to the north—and a few miles ahead—the mostly student crew on board the Ocean Sailing Academy’s entry *E’s Alee* was persevering, moving along at 5.4 knots in 9.5 knots of northeasterly wind. According to correspondent Will Haynie, who is racing on board, it’s been a pleasant yet slow trip, despite a rough night in the Gulf Stream. The good news is that these slow conditions have maximized the learning opportunities for the students on board, but they’ll definitely be ready for a congratulatory Dark n’ Stormy or two (rum and ginger beer) when the boat arrives in Bermuda, which as of this morning was estimated to be Saturday at 6:00 a.m. (according to iBoatTrack projections).

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.

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