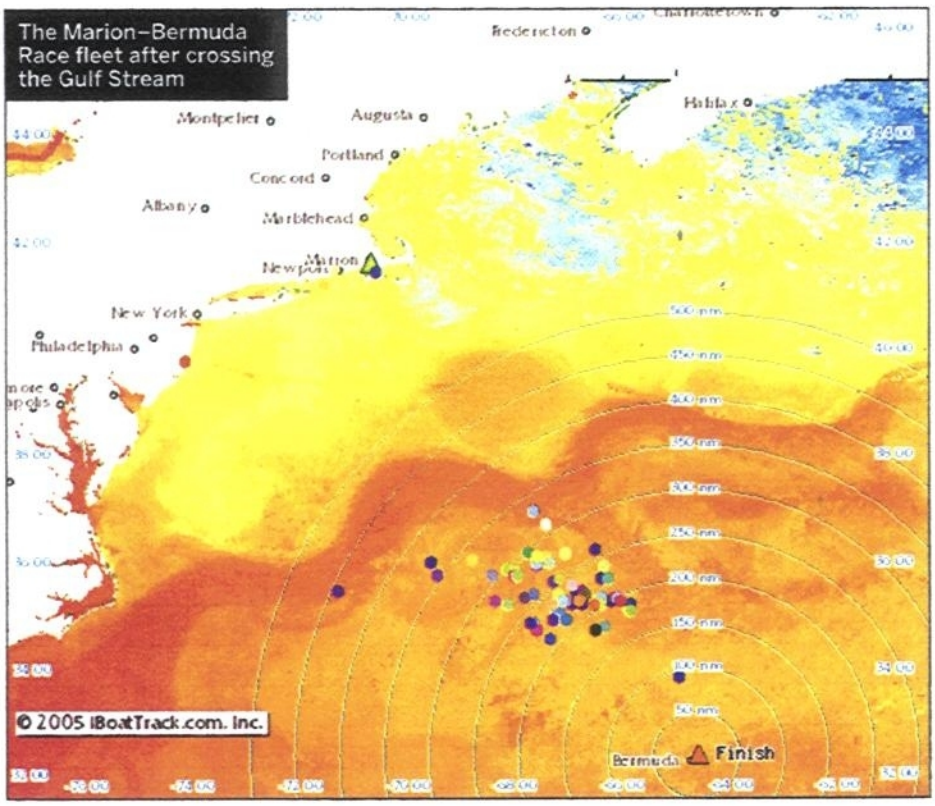

The Marion–Bermuda Race fleet after crossing the Gulf Stream

Keeping Track

An eye in the sky keeps tabs on passagemakers

IT WASN'T LONG AGO WHEN COMpetitors in the Bermuda 1-2 Race, a two-leg shorthanded offshore race from Newport to Bermuda (solo) and back (doublehanded), departed Newport and were out of sight, out of mind for anyone not in radio contact. During last June's race, however, anyone with an Internet connection could have followed a competitor mile by mile at www.iboattrack.com.

Race tracking isn't new. The professional offshore races—Volvo and Vendée Globe, for example—do it well. What's new is the notebook-size tracking device that Horizon Marine of Marion, Massachusetts, has developed for boats using their Web-based tracking system. Horizon can install the unit on both raceboats and long-distance cruisers, allowing friends and family on dry land to follow along.

The Coast Guard is also watching. According to the Bermuda 1-2 race-tracker map, Richard Baldwin's Luders 33, *Passages*, was traveling slowly away from Bermuda and apparently adrift in the Gulf Stream several days after the majority of the fleet had reached the finish. Race organizers alerted the Coast Guard, which followed the boat's slow progress and eventually sent an urgent broadcast message to the surrounding area. Turns out Baldwin was becalmed, had lost the use of his engine, and decided to turn around and sail to Maine. Earlier in the race, Maryland sailor Eric Johnson had broken the boom on *Dirigo*, his C&C 41, and started sailing for Maryland. "We were able to monitor his progress back to land," said Chet Goon, the chief architect at Horizon.

> Race organizers alerted the Coast Guard, which tracked the boat and eventually broadcast an urgent message to the surrounding area

The tracking device has to be mounted on deck to emit a clear signal. It weighs less than 2 pounds and is housed in a plastic case. Its internal GPS acquires the boat's position, and a simplex satellite modem antenna broadcasts this information to Horizon via a Globalstar satellite. If the tracking device is used heavily, its lithium battery will need to be changed once a year. Horizon, which is primarily in the business of collecting data for oceanographic surveys, collects the boat's signal and plots it on a chart.

Horizon offers the tracking device for $495 and a monthly service fee of $25 to $35. In June the Web site received 25 million hits from people following the progress of boats sailing in the Northeast's major distance races—including the Marion to Bermuda and Marblehead to Halifax. Half a dozen cruisers were also being tracked. For example, friends could follow J.M. and Gail Kiel on *Geneth*, a Spencer 53 pilothouse ketch, as they sailed north in Alaska's Inside Passage.

The race maps are interactive. You can select a seven-day composite map of Gulf Stream temperature, a wind model, and different bathymetry maps. Selecting Redraw Map will overlay selected maps. Other features include a compilation of maps going back to the start of a race. On tracking maps for cruisers, you can click on dots marking anchorages and get such information as arrival date and length of stay. It's a nice log for the cruiser and a resource for a racer second-guessing tactical decisions. ▲ **Josh Adams**

The ketch *Geneth*'s Alaska track

IMAGES COURTESY OF HORIZON MARINE