



Splashes

# In Hot Water

**W**e were just six hours into the 408-mile Ft. Lauderdale to Charleston Race and we couldn't break the triple zeros on the knotmeter. The race started in a dying northeasterly of around 8 knots, just enough to get the 11 boats started and headed out to the lumpy Gulf Stream. For several days prior it had been blowing hard from the northwest, shifting north then northeast. It was easy to see the edge of the Gulf Stream, right where the big, bumpy seas began.

We had to reach the stream to get the 3-knot push northward. But once we were in it, the breeze shut down. Trying to catch the lightest zephyrs with our  $\frac{3}{4}$ -ounce spinnaker proved

hopeless as the boat jerked about, bouncing in the rough seas and shaking any kind of shape out of the snapping, popping kite.

Under these conditions, John Evans' beautiful green Little Harbor 54 *Jasmine*, which weighs 60,000 pounds with a roller furling mainsail, electric winches and a chef, cannot keep up with the other ultralight dedicated race boats. Even some of our closer competitors weighed less than a third of *Jasmine*. (The big boys in the fleet, the STP 65s, such as *Rosebud*, would go on to fly to a new course record of 1 day, 7 hours, 52 minutes and 49 seconds.)

All of the competitors were equipped with IonEarth GPS tracking transponders, which reported positions and other data to the race Web site. With 2- to 6-knot breezes, even *Rosebud* and *Vanquish* tracked just 3 knots more of boat speed over the slowest boats in the fleet. It was a slow night for all of us. Without the Gulf Stream we wouldn't be moving at all.

With Gulf Stream position critical in this race, *Jasmine's* navigator Chris Woolsey was a natural for this job. He had been preparing data for weeks before the race, including satellite weather overlays on the chartplotter. On the screen, the Gulf Stream is shown in dark red for the warmest water, with yellows and greens fading to the blues of the colder inshore waters. With the knowledge that the fastest moving



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part of the Gulf Stream was the western wall, which was also the warmest water, we were trying get *Jasmine* to the inshore side of the "red" water for the fastest ride. Chris was born for this role. His father, Dean Woolsey, won this race in 1968.

It was also great timing for a yacht race. Friday night gave us a spectacular sunset closely followed by the most magnificent full moonrise I have ever seen. The orange-red moon seemed to cling to the horizon with a broadened lower limb as it climbed the eastern sky. The bright full moon later provided plenty of light for sail changes and spinnaker trimming.

Finally the breeze came up, and we set off close reaching at up to 8 to 10 knots boat speed, giving us 11 to 13 over the bottom. Later, as the breeze backed and we set our 1½-ounce spinnaker, we felt we were back in the race. The lumpy northerly seas had flattened out and were replaced by a southeasterly rolling swell, which boosted our speed in spurts as we accelerated down the waves. Whooping and hollering accompanied Barr Batzer at the helm as he hit 14.5 on the knotmeter.

The next tactical decision was determining when to make our left turn and exit the Gulf Stream. Staying in the stream too long would push us off to the east; heading in too soon could waste good current and put us into

an inshore cold countercurrent. We also had to consider the fastest sailing angle for the expected winds.

These weren't the only tough tactical decisions to be made. Tony, *Jasmine's* seagoing chef, had to decide if the angle of heel was too great for creating his Marsala wine sauce for the Chicken Marsala with garlic toast or if it would be better to serve the Ravioli de Crème for dinner. Then, at breakfast, could he safely crisp the bacon to have with the scrambled eggs or should he go with the sausages to have with the toasted bagels and muffins?

We jibed over to port tack, leaving the warm waters of the Gulf Stream behind and found a 1.5-knot current setting against us. Scanning the horizon, we had two boats in sight: *Santarella*, a Beneteau 40.7 from the IRC fleet, was just ahead of our port beam, and way off ahead to starboard was a red spinnaker that we later identified as *Primal Scream*, a light, performance racer in our class that owed us lots of corrected time. Shortly after 2 p.m. we were happy to hear *Primal Scream* call the race committee to announce their finish. *Jasmine* finished a little over an hour later, easily covering them on corrected time.

After storming across the finish line at 10.5 knots, we were met at the entrance to Charleston harbor by a RIB launch from Carolina



*Jasmine* heads to the starting line, above. The crew enjoys fresh sailing, left. The Gulf Stream blooms in orange, far left.

Yacht Club that, after first recording our finish time, steamed alongside us and passed over two icy coolers of lovely local Palmetto Beer. There was only one boat, *Black Diamond*, in our class still on the race course that could possibly beat us. The wind had kicked up to the upper 20s from the south, but we felt better when we heard that the *Black Diamond* was still some four hours out. We were cautiously jubilant but we would wait to celebrate until we knew the official results.

After we had secured *Jasmine* in the marina, tidied up about ship, had our showers and drove into Charleston for dinner, we finally got the official results—PHRF Class First Place: *Jasmine*. Our skipper, John Evans, was justifiably proud, but he would only defer all praise to his crew. A fine result for *Jasmine's* second ocean race, and I hear talk of Newport-Bermuda in 2010. -- Ron Schaper



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