

AMERICAN PROMISE

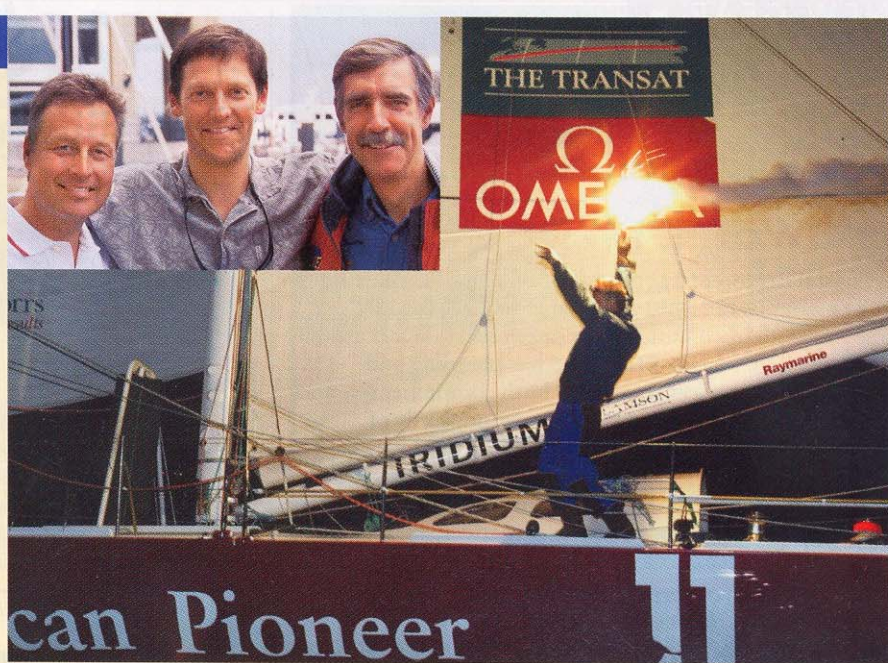
Rookie solo racers Kip Stone and Joe Harris, first and second in The Transat's Open 50 class, were still grinning days after they'd finished the race, still cruising on a natural high after what Harris described as "one of the most intense experiences" of his life. Neither was a known quantity before starting this race. Harris, CFO of a big-league real-estate investment company, and Stone, proprietor of a screen-printing business, are longtime sailors with plenty of ocean-racing miles behind them, but the solo racing scene is a big step from crewed racing. There is only one way to find out if you have the right stuff, and that is to try it.

The pair chose separate routes into this new world. Harris bought Brad Van Liew's well-traveled and proven 50-footer and had van Liew coach him. Stone's spanking-new boat was designed by the British firm Owen-Clarke. He sailed his unproven boat doublehanded from its builders in Australia to the start line in England and had more tiller time than Harris. Harris's *Wells Fargo–American Pioneer* is known to be a real flier on a reach; Stone's *Artforms* was designed to do its best in the upwind conditions typically found on The Transat. You'd have been hard pressed to predict which one would come out on top.

The American pair set the class pace right from the start. Harris won the start, but Stone soon took over and stretched out a 65-mile lead. As the weather deteriorated Harris gradually caught up to *Artforms*, and when the sun rose on day 10, Stone was greeted by the sight of *Wells Fargo* not 5 miles astern.

Harris was able to inch past, but he was unable to hold the lead for long. The strong headwinds in the latter part of the race might have been tailor-made for *Artforms*, and Stone began to pull away. A frustrated Harris gambled that a dive to the south would put him in a more favorable wind system; instead, he wound up parked in a flat calm while *Artforms* romped away to open a lead of nearly 300 miles. Stone finished in 15 days. Harris was nearly two days behind, having learned the hard way that preparation, hard work, and boatspeed count for little in solo racing unless they are spiced with a handful of luck.

As the two first-timers were battling it out, seasoned



Joe Harris celebrates a hard-fought second place in class. Inset: Harris, Kip Stone, and Rich Wilson

veteran Rich Wilson was engaged in an equally intense tussle in the 50-foot-multihull class. Wilson hadn't even intended to enter The Transat until he heard the finish was in his hometown. "That settled it for me," said the 54-year-old Boston native. "Otherwise nothing could have made me do this."

Wilson has covered tens of thousands of miles in his 53-foot trimaran, *Great American II*, setting a number of long-distance sailing records along the way. He last competed in The Transat in 1988. "I certainly don't remember it being as cold as this one," he said. His race was a 15-day battle against atrocious conditions that at one point left him "as frightened as I've ever been on this boat." Although Wilson finished 150 miles astern of the class winner, he was well inside the previous race record.

Sitting between Harris and Stone at the postrace press conference, Wilson smilingly declined to comment on his future sailing plans. He has nothing left to prove, and this race may well have been his last. Meanwhile, the audience was left to ponder the future of American participation in solo ocean racing—it looks set with Stone and Harris. All three competitors were born and bred in Massachusetts and currently live within 100 miles of each other, making the Northeast home to some of the toughest sailors in the States.

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