

SEA OF DREAMS



KIRA HORVATH/Staff photo

Hamilton resident Joe Harris recently completed a 16-day solo voyage from England to Boston on his 50-foot sailboat, the Gryphon Solo. His next goal is to complete a solo around-the-world race in 2006. When not at sea, Harris docks his boat here on Rowe's Wharf in Boston.

Hamilton man sets sights on solo voyages

BY BEN CASSELMAN
STAFF WRITER

Docked at Rowe's Wharf in Boston, Joe Harris' boat seems small.

The MBTA ferry dwarfs the 50-foot boat. So does nearly every yacht docked nearby, almost none of which has traveled more than a few miles out to sea.

Harris' single-masted sailboat, the Gryphon Solo, seems even smaller in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, as he well knows. A month ago, the Hamilton resident was aboard the boat — alone — with no land in sight.

"Fifteen hundred miles from help, it's a little intimidating," Harris said. "Whatever comes up, you've got to deal with it."

Harris, 44, was sailing from Plymouth, England to Boston Harbor as part of the "Transat" — a transatlantic race that is among the toughest solo races in the world. Harris finished second out of the four boats in his class.

Difficult as it was, it was just a warm-up for Harris' real goal: the 5 Oceans Race, an around-the-world-alone race that kicks off in 2006 and could take eight months to complete. The

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Transat took Harris 16 days; each leg of the 5 Oceans Race will take twice that.

Racing around the world alone has been a dream of Harris' for 20 years. A real estate executive when on land, Harris has sailed 25,000 miles in the past 15 years.

"I just enjoy the challenge of it, the fact that you have to be able to do everything," Harris said. "I've always had this need to be hands-on, to be self-reliant, and to really kind of test myself. It makes me feel like I'm alive."

Harris said his wife, who enjoys sailing a bit closer to shore, was initially reluctant about his ocean racing. But when she and their two young

KEEPING SANE WHILE AT SEA

Sailing alone across an ocean is an intense physical, mental and technological challenge — but a man's still got to eat. So how does a solo ocean racer like Joe Harris eat, sleep and stay sane during a 3,000-mile voyage?

Food: Three meals a day, plus the occasional energy bar. Dinner is mainly freeze-dried camping meals. Lunch is peanut butter and jelly or tuna sandwiches. Breakfast is oatmeal or eggs, while they last.

Sleep: An auto-pilot system keeps the boat on course while Harris sleeps, though he only takes "cluster naps" — a series of 20-minute naps strung together, from 4 to 6 a.m. each day.

Human contact: Satellite phone keeps Harris in daily contact with a public relations team and his family. Harris makes up race-related quiz questions for his son, who furnishes answers the next day.

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