

Connections

News and Trends
From the world of Marine Computing

Client Spotlight

Cruising Family Uses SSB Email to Stay in Touch

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In Brief

The latest release of Combitech's *Mscan Meteo Pro* weather software features automatic radio control and can receive weatherfax charts, NAV-TEX bulletins as well as forecasts transmitted via radioteletype. Call us for more information.

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"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do, than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream." -Mark Twain

Some read words like those wistfully, and plan for "maybe someday". But for the Reid family, late of Darien, Connecticut (but, make no mistake about this, proudly Canadian) they are words to live by.

The Reid's – mom and dad Martin and Julie, and "the kids" -- Graham, Jacqueline and Calvin -- are off exploring and dreaming right now. The story of how they got there is an inspiring model of one family's perseverance and commitment. In the space of just four months, starting last July and culminating last October, the Reid's 1) sold the family home and put their earthly possessions in storage; 2) set off on an ambitious quest up and down the Eastern seaboard for the boat of their dreams; 3) ultimately found the boat in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, and 4) moved aboard and headed south. Their ultimate destination? Well, the boat is named *We'll Sea*.

If that's not enough, they are our first clients to be featured on the national news. If you happened to be watching *ABC World News Tonight* on Tuesday March 5th, 2002 you caught a short piece towards the end of the broadcast about Herb Hilgenberg. Herb, of course, is the legendary retired Canadian sailor who dispenses weather and routing information to cruisers via SSB radio. The boat chosen by the news crew as an example of Herb's work was *We'll Sea*, as the Reid's set out on their second shot at a delayed effort to escape the icy clutches of the North. More on that in a moment.

Dan and I first met Martin Reid at our *Ocean Navigator*-sponsored seminar on Onboard Computing in Baltimore last spring. I remembered Martin in particular, because he was interested in pursuing amateur radio as a way to stay in touch while cruising. We bumped in to the Reid's again at the Newport Boat Show last fall, where they decided to pick up OCENS SeaStation 2000 weather software for their upcoming cruise. OCENS lets them receive weatherfax charts from their SSB while underway, or

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download both weatherfax charts and satellite images from the Internet when a connection is available (see related story, Page 3).

Somewhere between the Baltimore seminar and the Newport Boat Show, while simultaneously selling a home, buying a boat, and moving the family aboard, both Martin and Julie found the time to secure their General Class amateur radio licenses.

As they meandered down the Chesapeake headed south, the Reid's contacted me about obtaining a Pactor modem so they could send and receive email via amateur radio while cruising. We made plans to meet in St. Michaels, MD in a few days where I'd deliver the modem.

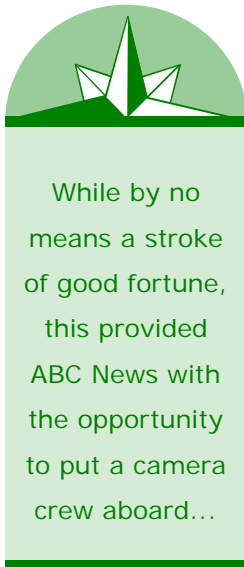
St. Michaels is where I got my first look at *We'll Sea*, a beautiful Ted Brewer-designed 60' ketch. She'd been professionally maintained through a succession of four previous owners and, from what I saw, the Reid's were continuing the tradition in fine fashion. We joked about buying stock in Epifanes.

But a minor glitch surfaced within about five minutes of the time I stepped aboard. It turned out the older Icom 700 SSB radio lacked a suitable connection to hook up the Pactor modem. Fortunately, Martin had manuals and schematics for the radio onboard, and a plan quickly emerged. From the drawings, it looked like a relatively simple modification would give us the necessary connections. Our colleagues at Mid-Shore Electronics in Cambridge, MD, were literally "down the road", and I was headed in that direction anyway. I scooped the radio off the boat and delivered it to Dave, Marty and Keith at Mid-Shore that same day -- the Reid's would follow up in a few days by moving their boat there, where the modified equipment could be reinstalled. The Reid's moved *We'll Sea* to Cambridge, and a few days later I was back aboard with the techs from Mid-Shore, making final connections and confirming that the SSB Email setup was good to go. Unfortunately, they had to take my word for it. A family emergency pulled the Reid's back to Canada for a visit, and led to a series of events that delayed their departure from Chesapeake Country until early February.

On the first shot, a broken drive coupling just offshore caused them to return to Norfolk for repairs. While by no means a stroke of good fortune, this provided ABC News with the opportunity to put a camera crew aboard and shoot the footage they needed for the Hilgenberg story.

Being licensed amateurs, the Reid's decided to use the *Winlink 2000* system for Email aboard. This remarkable service is free, but limited in the sense that correspondence of a business or commercial nature is prohibited. For the Reid's this wasn't a problem, and the *Winlink 2000* system offers other tangible benefits. Besides enabling them to send or receive Email (plain text only, very limited attachments), *Winlink 2000* has a position-reporting feature that lets anyone who's interested track their progress via the Internet.

It works like this -- periodically, the Reid's file a "Position Report" containing



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their lat/lon and a brief comment. This information is then posted on the Internet, in near-real time, on a map for all to see. To check this out, point your web browser to www.winlink.org/APRS/ and enter Martin Reid's call sign, KB1GUH in the Station Call Letters box. A related feature let's the Reid's query the system to find out the present location of fellow cruisers. In a recent Email, Martin and Julie also stressed the value of *Winlink 2000's* Catalog feature. The Catalog contains Bulletins, which the Reid's and other users can download direct to their onboard computer via SSB Email. The list of Bulletins is extensive and includes text weather forecasts, weatherfax charts, satellite imagery, GRIB weather files, and all sorts of other useful information. Martin reports using this feature extensively, especially to download fax charts when they miss a scheduled broadcast, or when received faxes are of poor quality due to interference or poor propagation.

At this writing the Reid family is on the move again, cruising somewhere in the Caribbean. Click on <http://pws.prserv.net/usinet.mkreid/reidfamly.htm> to see their home page complete with cruising diary, pictures, recipes, and some useful hints on "jiggling wires".

New Products

New Software Simplifies Fax Reception

OCENS *Station 2000* software products now work with your computer's sound card to receive weatherfax charts via Single Sideband Radio. A simple audio connection between the SSB or HF receiver and the computer's "Line In" jack makes the connection easy and straightforward, and eliminates the need for a separate "decoder" box or card.

The software can be configured to automatically capture and save incoming faxes, and features on-the-fly fine tuning controls for both reception and chart slant correction. *Station 2000* products also feature OCEN's unique ability to georeference fax charts, plotting your vessel right on the fax to easily determine your position in relation to developing weather systems. The software has a built-in schedule of radiofax broadcasts from stations around the world, which lists the charts broadcast from each station, the time of each broadcast and the frequencies on which the charts are transmitted.

OCENS software also contains built-in indexes to weather information available on the Internet. In addition to SSB, one can use a satellite phone, cell phone or regular landline to quickly download weather information on demand. *Station 2000* products are available starting at \$239.00. Existing users of *WeatherStation 2000* can upgrade to the soundcard version for \$60. *SeaStation 2000* users can upgrade for \$60-\$100, depending on which version of the software is presently in use.

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TO:

Tech Tip

Of Mice and GPS? Windows XP/2000 Users Take Note!

We've taken numerous calls from users of Windows XP and Windows 2000 who report that their computer mouse goes berserk, or disappears completely, whenever they connect their GPS. It seems the "hardware detection" step the operating system goes through when the computer boots is prone to mistakenly identifying the GPS as a mouse.

The not-so-elegant solution to this dilemma is to leave the GPS disconnected or powered off while the computer boots. When startup is complete, then connect the GPS and turn it on.

The classier solution is to disable the offending device. To do this, start the computer with the GPS connected and powered on. If the mouse starts acting up, turn off the GPS. Next, right-click on the "My Computer" icon and select "Properties". Click the "Hardware" tab and then press the "Device Manager" button. In Device Manager, double-click on the "Mice and Other Pointing Devices" title. Two mice will be listed — the one that belongs to your computer, and the mistakenly-identified GPS which usually shows up as a "Microsoft Serial Ball Point". Select the Microsoft Serial Ball Point and click on "Disable" at the top of the dialog box. Answer "Yes" to the confirmation message.

Now close Device Manager, turn on the GPS and start your favorite navigation software. All should be well.