

A letter to Lake Ontario 300 participants and spectators.

What happened with the race tracking?

Many people out there are wondering what happened to the race tracking system this past weekend. I know from some very spirited emails the level of frustration many of you felt. First off let me personally apologize for the poor performance. We have successfully tracked hundreds of events over the past four years and I take it personally when we do not live up to the highest level of service and excellence. Second I'll try to explain what happened. Not that it matters but I know there are some that are curious.

First let me clarify that our LIVE trackers do have a true GPS inside. They use cellular data upload which is low cost but has its challenges with coverage. Knowing this limitation in coverage we did two separate tests to check coverage prior to the LO300. Last fall we chartered a plane to fly a tracker over Scotch Bonnet course to get a general idea of coverage. This spring we put some tracking units on boats in the Susan hood event. The result was that we knew there would be holes in coverage but with the tracker's buffering capability no data was lost. The LO300 team decided that the coverage level was acceptable. A tradeoff between coverage and cost.

Server Down! So what happened? On Saturday, as we were monitoring server traffic (it was heavy even before the storm hit) we made the decision to upgrade. There was a lot of race left and the risk was low, we thought. The Kattack web server is a "virtual" server so no physical changes, just changes to some settings and a reboot. What we didn't see was the automatic upgrade that it triggered. Somehow, this upgrade crippled the database on the server. Needless to say, after 12 hrs on the phone with my web hosting company, multiple patches and reinstalls, the server was back (the upgrade did work, and performance was good for the rest of the event) To top it all, shortly after hearing the server was not going to be coming back up any time soon, I heard a squall blew in and everyone wanted to see where the boats were. Now I know maybe a bit how Tony Hayward must have felt.

So what happened to the tracks? As you well know, some of the boat's trackers worked as planned, buffered the data when out of range, and uploaded when back in cell range. Others did not. Some units just stopped tracking in the middle of the race. After looking at the tracks, a large number of units stopped working near the Niagara Bar Buoy. Others stopped elsewhere and some seem to have gaps in data. We will be investigating this over the next week. As I mentioned earlier, we ran multiple test prior to the regatta and did not see any problems.

There are no excuses here, I just want to let everyone know what happened and give my sincere apology for frustrations our tracking software caused during this great event.

Sincerely

Tom Verburgt - Founder/President