

Racing yacht uses space technology

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European space technology will be boosting the performance of at least one boat during this year's Transat Jacques Vabre international sailing contest.

Marc Thiercelin and Eric Drouglazet will be competing in Thiercelin's 60-foot yacht ProForm, equipped with more efficient solar cells, lighter batteries and an intelligent power management system -- all based on technology developed for Europe's space program.

A lighter battery based on a model originally developed for satellites was produced by SAFT, a French company. The set aboard Thiercelin's yacht weighs 242 pounds, compared with the 550-pound weight of conventional maritime batteries that produce the same amount of power.

In addition, the German company Solara designed two solar panels using a new type of polysilicon solar cells that are more efficient than standard cells.

And a French start-up company, Accuwat, developed an energy-management system using advanced technology developed for European spacecraft.

The race starts Saturday at Le Havre in France and ends 4,350 nautical miles distant in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil.

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