Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

SOS From Russian Scientists

Seven members of the USSR Academy of Sciences—now the Russian Academy of Sciences—have sent an urgent plea to U.S. scientists asking for help in acquiring scientific journals.

The group, which includes physicists Vitalii L. Ginzburg and Vitalii I. Goldanskii, asked the editor of *Physics Today* to send their imploring letter to major journals. In it, the scientists write that "the absence of hard currency completely deprives scientific institutions of Russia and other states of the former USSR of the subscriptions for foreign scientific periodicals in 1992.... At the present time, when scientific progress is simply inconceivable without the tightest international cooperation of scientists...the isolation of hundreds of thousands of our scientists from the outside world...will have pernicious consequences for the scientific community all over the world."

SOVFOTO

Goldanskii

The letter asks for help in keeping incoming subscriptions at the same level as in 1991. Specifically mentioned are the central scientific libraries of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Ekaterinburg (formerly Sverdlovsk), and Vladivostok, as well as the capitals of other former USSR states, and the largest institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences. No addresses are given. But Goldanskii is director of the academy's N.N. Semenov Institute of Chemical Physics, Ulitsa Kosygina, 4, 117334, Moscow.

Alcoholism: Modest Role Seen for Genes

Molecular biology's feverish hunt for the alcoholism gene has been a Now-You-See-It, Now-You-Don't affair (*Science*, 11 October 1991, p. 200). Nevertheless, the heavy publicity recent scientific papers have received has had an effect on the citizenry. Says psychologist Matt McGue of the University of Minnesota, "The lay public has this notion now that alcoholism is a genetic disorder." And that's the notion McGue and his colleagues want to temper: They have just published the results of a twin study that may restore some balance to the public's perceptions.

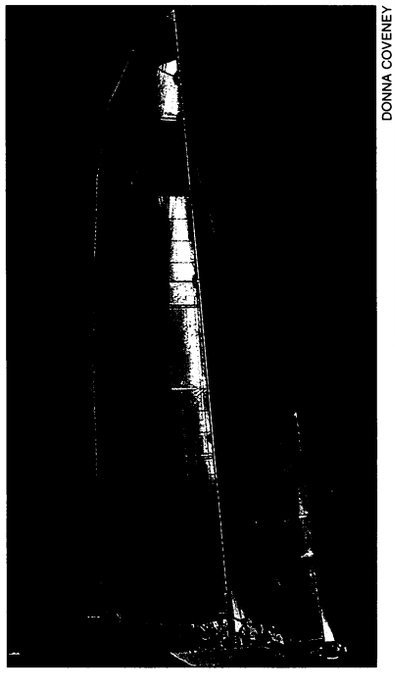
The twins-and-alcoholism study, one of the largest ever, and one of very few to include female subjects, is based on 356 patients drawn from a treatment program who along with their twins (both identical and fraternal) filled out mail questionnaires. The researchers assessed the genetic contribution to the disorder by comparing concordance rates between fraternal and identical twin pairs.

As expected, the researchers found substantial heritability for alcoholism among early-onset males—that is, those who experienced their first symptoms before the age of 20. But, according to the researchers' report in the current issue of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, the "single most remarkable finding" was the "modest genetic influence on alcohol problems in women and late-onset men." The magnitude of the genetic influence, they wrote, "may be more modest and age-gender specific than is currently and widely believed."

McGue says the study doesn't conflict with any prior findings. But psychologist and behavioral geneticist Robert Plomin of Pennsylvania State University points out that it carries an unfamiliar message: that for most alcoholics "there's no evidence for significant heritability." Plomin says, "In contrast to psychology, where there has been great resistance to [theories about] genetic influence," the alcoholism field "has been caught up in the medical establishment and everybody assumes it's a genetic disorder." As a result, write McGue and colleagues, "researchers may be ignoring the significant influence that the environment has in the origins of alcoholism."

MIT High Tech Goes After America's Cup

Chemical engineer and entrepreneur William Koch (B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) is in hot pursuit of sailing's coveted America's Cup. And his alma mater—along with $40 million from sponsorships, donations, and from Koch himself—is providing a technological edge that thus far seems to be proving decisive.



DONNA COVENEY

The sailing is academic. *MIT engineering bolstered* Defiant's *speed.*

The design team leader of Koch's America³ syndicate is Jerome Milgram, a member of MIT's ocean engineering faculty. "Bill Koch likes to investigate things using the scientific method more than the other [syndicate] leaders," says Milgram. "He's paying for much of it, so he gets what he wants."

What Koch wants is the most sophisticated design strategy of any team going for the Cup. He had some financial resources—family oil money—but he only discovered his passion for sailing in 1984, so he went to the experts. "But when I talked to a bunch of yacht designers about what makes a boat go fast, I got some really strange answers. No scientific answers," he told *MIT Tech Talk*. Koch got some of his own answers after Milgram's 10-member team and assorted faculty members, graduate students, alumni, and MIT staff put together designs drawing on the power of a VAX 9000 supercomputer for modeling the forces acting on a boat and data from a unique test boat that directly measures sail forces.

Although any radically different design features are below the waterline or shrouded behind tight security at America³'s compound on San Diego Bay, the end result of Koch's scientific approach is strutting its stuff in the early races for the right to defend the Cup against a foreign challenger next May. His boat *Defiant*, the second built of an eventual four, is undefeated after five races.

Another Stanford Resignation

It looks as though beleaguered Stanford University is being swept clean of its highest ranking officials. In the latest aftershock following the resignation of president Donald Kennedy, provost James Rosse announced last week that he too will resign—as of April—to become chief executive officer for Freedom Newspapers, a Southern California newspaper chain.

Rosse, an economist who specializes in the economics of newspapers and media, has been Kennedy's second in command for the last 7 years. But Stanford spokesmen do not link Rosse's departure to the university's indirect cost difficulties. In fact, Rosse told *Science* he would have left his post a year earlier had he not been needed to help stabilize "financial planning" in