



PFD FOR INFANTS

I look forward to every *Practical Sailor* issue. We are departing in September with our 7-month-old daughter. Can you suggest a PFD for an infant? Do you have a write-up on them already?

Bill Calfee

Be Here Now II, Halberg Rassy 38
Shelburne, Vt.

PS conducted a series of tests on children's PFDs in October 2006. Disappointed with the offerings, we presented a conceptual infant-toddler vest in June 2007. The relevant articles are posted in the "Tools and Techniques" section of our website at www.practical-sailor.com. The challenges of designing a universal infant/toddler PFD are great, and we would not want to instill a false sense of confidence in these devices. Habituating your child to wearing a vest and finding one with a proper fit is important, but even the best fitting jackets had trouble keeping our test children in the face-up position. These jackets may buy you some seconds should your child slip into the water from a dock or an anchored boat, but constant vigilance and proactive measures such as lifeline netting, safety harnesses, and swim lessons should be high priorities. Key components in an infant jacket are crotch straps, head-up collar flotation, and a collar strap for lifting/supporting the child when moving from the dinghy or dock to the boat.

CREW HEADSETS

With respect to your report on crew communication devices featured in the May 2009 issue: When we started cruising, we tried virtually every radio on the market. The voice-activated units were unusable. We soon



The moon rises above the Calfee family's Halberg Rassy 38, Be Here Now II.

realized that we had to have duplex radios. This means that both people can talk at the same time. This may seem trivial, but it is the key feature required on a boat.

The EartecTD 900 Duplex radios (www.eartec.com) have served us well. We have lived on our 34-foot boat for the last five years and cruised from Washington state through British Columbia and all around southeastern Alaska. The TD 900s have had heavy use while docking and anchoring. Of all the items on our boat, the TD 900s would rank within the top five as favorites.

Also, we use the Monarch headsets because they supply sound to both ears. These headsets added a few dollars to the price tag, but were definitely worth the expense.

We purchased our TD 902 Monarch radios in February 2004 for \$299. The price hasn't changed.

Last summer, we talked to a couple using a different headset. When they said that their units cost less than \$70 for a pair of headsets, we figured that we could purchase a pair of these cheaper units and (if they worked out) sell our TD-900s on eBay.

The day the new headsets arrived, my *Practical Sailor* arrived with an article describing these cheaper units from Cruising Solutions. Your testers concluded that the units had a bit of static and a few other downsides. We tried the units and had quite a few complaints. There was quite a bad hum in the headsets, the sound came out of one ear only, and the micro-

phone boom was wimpy. They were returned the same day.

All-in-all, we think that the TD-900 radios are well worth the price. The audio is fantastic.

Robert Meacham

LaBelle, American Tug 34
Sitka, Alaska

REUSING SHRINK WRAP

Your May 2009 article on green boating overlooked another option for saving on shrink wrap. In addition to canvas covers and recycling shrink wrap, consider reusing your shrink wrap cover.

Shrink wrapping is well within the capability of an average DIYer. The materials and heat gun will pay for themselves in the first year, especially if the gun is shared by two or three boatowners.

If you carefully cut and slide the cover off the bow or stern, it can be re-installed and gently reshunk at least one more year and perhaps two, saving a huge amount of plastic. A roll of the shrink tape will easily patch a few goofs or

PRACTICAL SAILOR ONLINE

If you are still catching up on spring maintenance projects and need some advice, you'll find a wealth of information in the "Tools & Techniques" section at www.practical-sailor.com. The section carries some classic tests, DIY tips, and special reports resurrected from the archives.



Brigadoon, an Ericson Mk II owned by readers Marta and Walt Crichlow, awaits its refinished mast to be stepped.

Photo courtesy of Marta Crichlow

burn-throughs. It may not look as pretty as a virgin job, but I imagine you would have to recycle thousands of plastic bottles to equal one shrink wrap cover.

Jonathan Caldwell
Calypso. Gulfstar 50
Via e-mail

BRIGADOON REUNION

We were so thrilled to see on the back cover of the May 2009 issue the picture of *Brigadoon*, the Yankee Dolphin No. 102. We purchased her in 1968 and sailed her until 1975. We lived aboard for two years (1969-1972) with a 2-month-old baby, an old English sheepdog and two Burmese cats!

My husband, Walt, crafted the teak name boards on the stern, and crafted and installed a wonderful liquor cabinet and wine rack that I understand are still onboard.

We had many lovely times aboard and finally sold her to finance a house in the country after our 2-year-old son, who could row a dinghy, did not recognize what a tree was! (We thought we were depriving him of a normal life. If we had only known!) We are finally back on the water with an Ericson Mk II 35-footer also named *Brigadoon*. After all, it's our magical place!

Marta Crichlow
Brigadoon, Ericson Mk II
Scappoose, Ore.

SAN JUAN 24

I am a solo daysailor of a San Juan 24 in waters that I am familiar with (Long Island Sound), but I am utterly confused as to what instruments I should have on board. I would love to see an article on that topic. For example, do I need a fixed-mount VHF or will a handheld one suffice? Do I need radar, a radar reflector, or nothing of the sort? Do I need a chartplotter, knotmeter, etc., and, if so, what is recommended?

Mitch Dranow
San Juan 24
Long Island Sound

In our January 2008 issue, we published a special report on how technology was impacting traditional navigation skills. Accompanying that article was a chart that roughly ranked our priorities for navigation equipment aboard various types of boats, ranging from daysailors to offshore voyagers, with further sub-categories based on one's budget. The article did not include communication devices.

How you use the boat is as important as where you sail. While you could safely sail Long Island Sound in clear weather with just a chart and a compass to guide you, a few key items will increase your safety and convenience without too much expense.

We'd recommend a fixed VHF

radio, which provides greater range than a handheld at about the same price. A handheld is a good backup, if you have the budget. For navigation, a handheld GPS, charts, and plotting tools will suffice, but a chartplotter or combination plotter-sounder would be a worthwhile investment considering your penchant for singlehanded. Also, a depth sounder is a very useful aid when navigating and anchoring. The alarm features can be particularly handy in unmarked or poorly marked channels. Radar can save your skin in the fog, but it is a bit much for a daysailor. A radar reflector would be a good idea, particularly in an area as heavily travelled as Long Island Sound.

As for the knot log, most sounders come with a knot-log function and this is helpful, but they are prone to fouling, and on a small coastal cruiser such as yours, the GPS lets you track progress. What you lose is a sense of what the current is doing, but when you're standing still in Plum Gut, this becomes fairly obvious.

SPIN-TEC FURLERS

I enjoyed the article on the Alado furler system. I was wondering whether PS plans to also review the Spi-Tec system (www.spin-tec.com).

I was intrigued by its large drum, no bearings, and simple operation. I am considering buying this system and wanted to see a review on it.

Michael Simmons
Via e-mail

The Spin-Tec is included in our upcoming test on conventional headsail furlers. It is similar to the Alado in its design approach, requiring no head swivel.

FULL SERVICE YARD?

After graduation in 2002, my wife and I bought a used 1984 Beneteau Idylle 13.5 to live aboard. In order to get another 25 years out of the hull, we would like to conduct a complete refit; replace the plumbing, electrical system, standing rigging, update the

electronics, remake the interior, etc. Unfortunately, we don't have the time or technical knowledge to do it ourselves. Do you have any recommendations for a boatyard that can provide the full spectrum of services that has a reputation for standing behind their work? The boat is currently in storage in Oak Harbor, Wash., while we are living overseas for another two years (on dry land).

Robert Aho
Beneteau Idyll 12.5
Oak Harbor, Wash.

You are in luck in that the recession has left a lot of qualified marine tradesman looking for work. While you can hire a contractor or yard to oversee the entire project, the final bill might far exceed what you paid for your boat, based on your description of your projects.

Finding specialists for each project will save money, but it will require more time.

We recommend looking for technicians with many good references as well as relevant certification from the American Boat and Yacht Council. Many boatyards have a list of qualified contractors who they allow to work on their premises.

Our request for do-it-yourself yard picks generated a terrific response from our readers, particularly on the West Coast (See "Reader Survey," page 11), perhaps a reader in your region can recommend someone.

We toured the Port Townsend Shipyard in Port Townsend, Wash., in 2007 and were very impressed with the range of talent and the quality of the work performed by the various contractors in that area.

TARTAN 34 OWNERS

I represent the Tartan 34 Classic Organization (www.t34classic.org). We'd like to announce the creation of our new website. Is there a place in your magazine and/or website for this?

Eliot Shanabrook
Via e-mail



Darius Morawski sent us this screen shot of his boat sailing on land near Beaufort, N.C.

The "Links" section of our website, www.practical-sailor.com, includes a directory of boat-owner associations. We've added your T34 association to the list. We welcome input from various owner's associations. Recently, we've been able to work with a few of them in developing educational materials, and we look forward to expanding that program. If any other owners' groups would like to add a link to the PS website, please contact the editor at practicalsailor@belvoirpubs.com.

DIGITAL CHARTS

Since you are planning a review of autopilots, maybe you could conduct a similar review on chartplotters. I recently spent a year cruising and was extremely disappointed in the quality of the chartplotters and the information they deliver. I was in several dangerous situations because I was naive enough to think that the information delivered by the marine units is accurate. Not so.

Georeferencing on marine cartography is atrocious. I am amazed that my \$100 automotive GPS unit can find me an obscure address and tell me on which corner the ATM machine is, but my \$2,700 marine unit together with my \$280 GPS and \$600 of chart cartridges can't put me in the channel on the Intracoastal Waterway or show me the entrance to some major port accurately. Are we overpaying for half-baked solutions? Maybe we should ask

the automotive guys to develop a marine chartplotter and charts. At least I could find an ATM at a marina.

Darius Morawski
Whitby, Ontario

We feel your ire. We dare not fathom how the location of the nearest McDonald's became more important than that of a dangerous shoal, but we suspect that the landlubber majority is behind it. We've also had the experience of watching our boat plow through a swath of mangrove on our chartplotter when we were actually in a clear-well-marked channel, and even printed, corrected government charts have placed us frighteningly far from our actual location. Keeping charts and software updated can help minimize errors (see the April 2008 article on digital chart updates), but we field enough complaints regarding digital chart errors to be wary of what we see onscreen. No manufacturer is exempt.

We still keep our paper charts handy and abide by the navigator's adage of not relying on a single source of information. The most common problems with digital charts are errors that occurs when raster charts are converted to vector format, and when users overzoom beyond the survey scale. Sailors can help reduce actual errors by reporting them to the chartmakers. Most have forms for this purpose on their websites. NOAA chart errors can be flagged in an error report to the Na-

FIVE STARS FOR LOWRANCE

I did everything wrong when I bought my Lowrance Global Map 6000C chartplotter. It was a discontinued item bought from West Marine. For one reason or another, it was a year before I eventually installed it, at which point the unit proved to be defective.

I was then beyond the warranty period on a discontinued item. I contacted Lowrance, and they asked me to send it back. They sent a replacement within the week. I installed that one, but it too simply didn't work. I called again, and sent the unit back, this time with the chart SD card installed (not recommended, naturally, but I wanted them to see the fault with my card). Within a week, I got a new unit back, with my card, and it worked.

We have since relied on the unit to go to far-away places, and the unit has performed flawlessly. I am naturally a Lowrance customer for life. Lowrance (www.lowrance.com) went well above and beyond the call of duty. Hats off.

David Vis,
Dauphine, Tosca 36
Nice, Calif.

STANDARD HORIZON

Last year, while cruising in the Caribbean, I noticed some intermittent transmission problems with my Standard Horizon HX460SS handheld VHF (www.standardhorizon.com). I recently decided to see about having the problem checked out and sent the radio to Standard Horizon. Since the radio was past the initial warranty period, I was expecting to have to pay a minimum repair-replacement cost.

Shortly after they received the radio, I was contacted by Standard Horizon's Tim Johnson and was kept up to date on the status of the radio. Tim mentioned that the problem might just be a defective antenna but since the radio was out of warranty, he would have it completely checked

out. I was pleasantly surprised when I received the radio back with a new antenna and a note that they had completed a thorough check of the radio and that it should be in top operating condition. The new antenna, diagnostic service, and return shipping were provided free. What a pleasure to deal with a company that clearly goes the "extra-mile" with customer service.

Ron Hilgert
Sails Call
Pultneyville, N.Y.

STANSPOK COOKSET

I had acquired a StanSport Deluxe family stainless cookset, a nice, compact cookset highly suitable for use on a sailboat. The problem was that I misplaced the detachable handle.

After being notified of my predicament, Jeremy at StanSport (www.stansport.com) provided a replacement handle without charge. His actions were greatly appreciated and unexpected.

Jack Weisinger
Tumbleweed, Beneteau 351
Kemah, Texas

THURSTON SAILS

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Steve Thurston of Thurston-Quantum Sailmakers in Bristol, R.I. (www.thurstonsails.com). Steve and Quantum built me new, high-tech sails last year for my Mariner 47, *Free Spirit*. The sails were of the highest quality, and Steve has made every effort to ensure that they not only fit well but that any adjustments required were done promptly and well. He has driven up to Quincy to help me take the sails down and to put them back up on *Free Spirit*, and he cheerfully stored them at his loft over the winter.

I cannot express my appreciation for the thoroughness of his service.

Bob Gould
Free Spirit, Mariner 47
Wellesley, Mass.

tional Geospatial-Intelligence Agency at www.nga.mil/portal/site/maritime. The U.S. Power Squadron and NOAA also have a cooperative charting program. Information can be found at www.usps.org/national/coch.

FRIDGE OPTIONS

I need to replace the refrigeration and freezer systems installed in my boat when it was built in 1981.

For the refrigeration side, one option is to beef up the insulation in the existing box and then buy one of the efficient, new 12-volt marine systems that use a Danfoss compressor and an evaporator plate. Another is to buy a marine AC/DC under-counter front-opening refrigerator. A third option is to buy an Energy Star commercial 120-volt under-counter front-opening refrigerator. Using 120 volts is not a problem as my boat has an inverter, a back-up inverter, and a generator.

I can find nothing discussing the relative efficiency of the various systems.

Stephen Babcock
Via e-mail

Converting a well-insulated box to a fridge freezer is typically the most efficient option. To get an idea of power requirements for the retrofit kits on the market today, see our comparison beginning on page 7.

CORRECTIONS

Page 29 of the May 2009 issue incorrectly stated that overload flags in safety tethers were recommended by the International Sailing Federation. The Offshore Special Regulations require these in tethers purchased after 2001. A line that has been overloaded shall be replaced as a matter of urgency.

*Practical Sailor welcomes letters from our readers. Please include your name, home port, boat type, and boat name. Send e-mail to practicalsailor@belvoirpubs.com and mail to *Practical Sailor*, 7820 Holiday Dr. S., Suite 315, Sarasota, FL 34231.*