

The ActiveTrax's Lithium-ion battery can be charged by its solar panel or hand crank.



ounces. At \$40 (www.seattlesportsco.com), the go-anywhere ActiveTrax is a good solution for owners of small boats who don't want to bother with fixed systems. Now, if only it were waterproof.

QUICK-DRY TRAVEL TOWELS

In the August 2007 issue, we gave a thumbs-up to Discovery Trekking Outfitter's Wick-er Warmup towel. This summer, we had an opportunity to compare it to the MicroNet Ultra-Compact Microfiber Towel by McNett, a Washington-based adventure-gear maker.

Like the DTO towel, the MicroNet dries in a fraction of the time it takes a cotton towel to dry. Hand-wringing removed most of the water from both, but the soft, microfiber suede MicroNet actually dried slightly faster than the polyester DTO towel in our testing.

Both the DTO and MicroNet towels employ silver antimicrobial technology to kill bacteria and prevent odors from developing, and both pack down quite small, taking up very little space in a bag or locker. One feature testers particularly liked about the MicroNet was its corner loop with a snap, which allowed users to hang it to dry from a clothesline, tree, or rigging without worry that it would blow away.

We tested the large (30 x 50 inches), but the MicroNet comes in several sizes and comes with a mesh case. DTO offers pillowcases made of the same quick-dry material—an item that could prove a pleasure on a wet passage.

Both towels are high-quality, priced around \$20, and live up to their claims of fast dry times and funk prevention.

Some testers preferred the drying loop and the softer feel of the micro suede to the polyester. But in the end, either travel towel would prove handy for the boat, beach, or after warm solar shower.

SEATTLE SPORTS CAMP BUCKET

Another product from Seattle Sports that we've gotten much use from onboard and in camp is the collapsible bucket (\$14, www.seattlesportsco.com). The heavy-duty vinyl bucket has an abrasion-resistant bottom and a carrying strap.

On small, galley-less boats, it's great for washing up a few dishes or handwashing essential apparel on short cruises. The best part is that the 12-liter, 10 x 9.5-inch bucket collapses flat for easy storage, and it can be washed in the dishwasher. ▲

Crossing Over

Gear that goes camping and cruising.

When it comes to gear for the outdoor enthusiast, there are a lot of crossover products. Hikers, bikers, boaters, backpackers, and climbers share a need for lightweight, durable, and practical equipment. So as *Practical Sailor* editors geared up for our summer adventures, we looked for products that could serve double-duty on the boat and on the trail.

ACTIVETRAX DELUXE ON-THE-GO AUDIO

A self-powered radio/iPod external speaker, the ActiveTrax Audio is small enough to fit in a backpack but offers plenty of good sound. The unit has an AM/FM and weather-band radio, and a jack allows it to be a speaker for an iPod or other USB-compatible device.

The ActiveTrax's Lithium-ion battery can be charged via its hand-crank or a top-mounted solar panel. According to maker Seattle Sports Co., a full charge will yield seven hours of radio play. (Playing an iPod uses more power.) The ActiveTrax reaches full charge after 35 hours of sun, or 40 minutes of hand cranking. But it will play without being fully charged.

We used our test unit with an iPod for about four hours in full sun, without any prior charging, and it worked flawlessly. It held enough charge to last the night (about three more hours). For every minute of hand-cranking, users should reap 20 minutes of music.

In its padded carrying case, the ActiveTrax measures 3.5 x 3.5 x 5 inches and weighs 2



CONTACTS

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Ground Tackle

A new take on retrieving lost anchors.

As *Practical Sailor* prepares for a new round of anchor tests, we've been on the hunt for new anchors, as well as new accessories. One of the most interesting devices to come our way is the Anchor Rescue developed by Richard Provonchee, a sailor and principal in Boxer Marine Inc., based in Cushing, Maine.

The most common complaint about anchors is their lack of holding, but an anchor that refuses to budge—can also have serious consequences. The Anchor Rescue uses an innovative two-part system to free fouled anchors.

The typical antidote to fouling is to attach a buoyed line to the anchor crown so that it can be hauled backward out of its snag. Most anchors have an eye at the crown for attaching a buoyed retrieval line. (Danforth-style anchors are an exception).

The retrieval line must be attached before you anchor, adding one more complication when setting and hauling. For this reason, most cruisers use buoyed lines only in known trouble spots—deep unfamiliar anchorages, rocky or foul ground, wreck-strewn harbors, etc.—often marked on charts as “Foul Ground.” In most anchorages, however, you can't be sure of what's on the bottom.

The effectiveness of a retrieval line will depend upon anchor design, what the anchor is hung on, and sea conditions. In a dire situation, when the anchor still won't budge, the rode is cast off and the buoyed retrieval line (and a buoyed rode, if there is time) mark the anchor for pickup later.

There are a variety of hooks, claws, and rings designed to rescue anchors that aren't fitted with retrieval lines. Weighted claws and rings can theoretically slide down the rode and over the anchor shaft, and the boat can be positioned to pull

backward on the anchor. But in practice, this is not easy, particularly if the shaft is buried in rock or sand. If the rode itself is fouled, these rings or claws won't help.

HOW IT WORKS

Provonchee's Anchor Rescue uses two components to replace the usual retrieval line. The first is the slider, a stainless-steel tube with two raised lips and a short length of stainless-steel chain welded to it. The slider is installed over your anchor chain and secured with plastic wire ties to the chain, just above where the rode shackles to the anchor shaft. The slider's short chain tether is shackled to the crown of the anchor (see top photo, above). Cable ties are then used to secure the chain in place along the length of the shaft.

The retriever body is a hinged plastic cylinder that is sized to fit easily over the slider. Lead weights help the slider descend down the rode during rescue. Spring-loaded stainless pins inside the retriever body lock the slider in place when the two components mate.

To retrieve a fouled anchor, pull the anchor as taught as possible and then clap the retriever onto the top of your anchor rode. Then send it down the cable with a retrieval line attached. The retriever mates with and locks onto the slider. Slack the anchor rode, haul on the retriever line, and viola! Tugging on the retrieval line breaks the cable ties so that you are effectively pulling from the crown of the anchor, just as you would be with a conventional, permanently fixed retrieval line.

Once the anchor has broken free, you can continue pulling on the rode itself. After rescue, the retriever is unclashed,



The Anchor Rescue comprises the nylon car, the stainless-steel retrieval tool, and a Starboard wedge for releasing the device.

and the slider and its tether are repositioned and re-secured with wire ties.

DOES IT WORK?

We tried the device several times with a 24-pound Delta Fast-set plow anchor (see top photo) in waters up to 30 feet. It worked just as claimed. Getting the retriever unclashed from the rode could be easier, but we wouldn't expect to do it too often.

Buoyed retrieval lines are inconvenient, particularly when re-anchoring several times. The anchor retriever eliminates this hassle, but it is no substitute for a buoyed anchor.

For instance, it doesn't solve the more common problem of a wrapped or fouled rode, something that a buoyed retrieval line can help fix. We also wonder whether the tether chain may effect an anchor's ability to set. So far, we have not noted any difference.

The Anchor Rescue comes in two sizes: the AR-312 for 5/16-inch chain (\$229) limited to 350 pounds of pull, and the ARSQ-375 (\$314) for 3/8-inch chain limited to 500 pounds. It's more interesting than it is necessary, but the developer earns our respect for his creative approach. ▲

CONTACTS

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