

Look Ma, No Hands

For those of us who spend nearly as much time under the water as on it, the Liquid Image 310 video mask sounded like a great addition to our diving kit—and a good fix for our gadget addiction—so we had to give it a try when we came across it at a spring boat show.

The Liquid Image 310 is a snorkel/dive mask with a built-in waterproof digital camera that shoots still photos and video (with audio) in depths up to 65 feet. Other video masks in the Liquid Image line are rated waterproof for 15- to 130-foot deep, and the maker offers accessories like side-mountable flashlights and lens filters to enhance the quality of the photos and videos. The 310, powered by two AAA batteries (Lithium, alkaline, or NiMH), has 16 megabytes of internal memory and accepts microSD cards up to 8 gigabytes. That translates to 11,200 photos or 160 minutes of video.

We tested the 310 mask cam in a freshwater pool after a week of rain left our local waters with the clarity of a milkshake. The camera was very easy to operate with only two buttons—one for power and switching between video and still modes, and the other being the shutter control/video stop-and-start button. The only drawback of the simplified button controls is that they would be challenging to use with gloved hands.

A small LCD in the mask shows mode and power status as well as battery life. Red and blue lights that are visible to the user (but not distracting) and audible beeps let you know when you've switched between modes and when power is on. Crosshairs on each side of the mask lens help users line up the photos/videos but don't interfere with the view.

Testers really liked the ability to shoot continuous video hands-free, which is not an option with a standard waterproof point-and-shoot. Being able to look at what was around us rather than staring into an LCD to be sure our subject was in the frame was a plus. The downside of not having an LCD viewer was that we had to wait to view our shots until we plugged the mask into our laptop. Even with the crosshairs, framing subjects with the mask cam took some getting used to; all of our shots tended to be lower than we had gauged them.

We pitted the Liquid Image against an Olympus Stylus 1050SW, which is rated to 33 feet, to rate the mask cam's image quality and ruggedness. While the 310's video quality was much better than that of its still shots, in our opinion, neither was as high-quality as those taken with the Olympus. We attribute that to the obvious fact the Olympus boasts double the resolution (10.1 megapixels) of the Liquid Image (5 megapixels for stills and 780x420 for video)—but it also costs twice as



Testers preferred the hands-free operation of the Liquid Image 310, but shooting at only 5 megapixels means the quality of still-photos is below that of some waterproof cameras. Compare the top photo above, which was taken with a 10-mp Olympus Stylus 1050SW, with the bottom photo, which was taken in the same conditions with the Liquid Image 310.

much. The 310 did seem more rugged than the Olympus, and its waterproofing barriers seem more durable.

The supplied editing software, ArcSoft MediaImpression, lets users tweak photos and videos, and you can even make movies. Testers found it intuitive and easy to use.

Bottom line: If you're looking for a high-quality camera to use on, in, and off the water, this isn't it. If you're an avid snorkeler or diver, the Liquid Image can be a bargain—we found 310 bundles online for \$150 with a 4 gig microSD card and a camera bag—when you consider a good snorkeling mask is \$50-plus. The video mask has a simple, rugged digital camera that sailors will enjoy using to document their cruising adventures. There's nothing like posting a clip of the world below your keel when anchored off Aruba to inspire envy in your social network, and Liquid Image even has a special YouTube area to post mask users' underwater videos. ▲

DIVE CAM CENTRAL, 888/399-5512, www.divecamcentral.com



The Omnia Oven—which resembles a bundt pan (above)—fits atop most regular-sized stovetop burners.

Photos by Frank Lanier and courtesy of Right Track Designs and Speedseal

Stove-top Baking: How Sweet It Is

There's nothing like the smell of fresh-baked treats wafting from the galley, and thanks to the Omnia Oven, the crew of any boat with a cooktop, grill, or hotplate can enjoy fresh baked goods onboard. The Omnia Oven, a new take on the old Dutch oven, can bake anything from cookies to meatloaf without the need for a conventional oven.

HOW IT WORKS

The Omnia stovetop oven has three parts: an aluminum pan for the food; a steel base plate with a hole in its center; and an aluminum lid with ventilation holes to give cakes and breads space to rise.

Convection currents created by the stove's heat provide uniform top and bottom heat to cook the food. An air lock between the base and the pan creates bottom heat, while the central conical hole funnels hot air over the top of the food.

The Omnia Oven works best over an

open flame (propane, alcohol, etc.), but it also works on electric stoves and hotplates. Electric heat sources, however, increase cook times 25 to 50 percent.

HOW WE TESTED

According to its maker, the 2.1-quart Omnia can cook most any meal that can be baked in a conventional oven.

Test day for the Omnia coincidentally fell on one PS tester's birthday, so we let him choose the test food. His cake of choice? A pineapple upside-down cake.

The cake was prepped and cooked per a normal recipe. Testers used the Omnia on a gas stovetop, and after 30 minutes of "baking" (the same time it would have taken in a conventional kitchen oven), the result was a delicious cake.

WHAT WE FOUND

Users should be sure to rinse the Omnia with fresh water after use as the compo-

nents may eventually corrode. Weighing in at approximately 1 pound, the Omnia has a diameter of 10.5 inches and is 5.5 inches tall, including the lid, making it fairly easy to stow in a galley cabinet or locker.

Testers liked that the Omnia can be used on a propane grill, moving the cooking (and heat) out of the cabin—a definite bonus in hot weather.

Bottom line: PS testers gave the Omnia two thumbs up. We wouldn't use it to cook a 20-pound roast, but it should do just fine for most oven-based cooking and baking needs. With an MSRP of \$80 (we found it online for about \$52) and a one-year warranty, it's a worthy investment for small-boat owners who don't have the space for a full range. ▲

CONTACT: CONTOUR MARKETING,
888/551-1041, www.contoure.com

Right Track Offers a Creative Storage Fix

Even the best laid-out boat interior has areas of wasted space begging to be utilized. Right Track Designs' storage system puts that dead space to use.

Right Track's system, distributed by Sailing Angles Inc., comprises removable storage bags and tracks to hang them on. The zippered bags come in standard and custom styles and fabrics, ranging from laminated sail cloth or clear PVC plastic (so you can see the bag's contents) to mesh fabrics for wet gear.

Each bag has a bolt rope sewn into the back of it and comes with a pre-cut section of grooved PVC track sized to accept the bolt rope.

While testers liked the bags, we loved the versatility and mobility the track mounting system allows. With one packing, you can ready your soft-sided gear bag at home, slide it into the mounting track when you get onboard, and you're secured for sea. The system is optimal for mounting under shelves in a V-berth to store clothes or under cockpit locker lids to hold the shore-power cord or winch handles. Testers found instal-



The removable storage bags take the pack-unpack-repack routine out of a weekend cruise.

SpeedsealLife Puts a New Spin on Keeping Cool



Picture this: You fire up the iron jenny in preparation to exit a crowded anchorage. As the anchor slides onto the bow roller, the engine overtemp alarm shrieks a noisy reminder that you've skipped item number 2 on your pre-departure checklist—open the engine cooling water seacock. Your water-pump impeller typically would be toast at this point, but you've got an ace up your sleeve, SpeedsealLife. So you simply duck down below, open the seacock, verify the engine temp is good, and then continue on your way. At your destination, you check the impeller, verify that it's fine, and life is good.

SpeedsealLife, a new product from the makers of the original Speedseal, is designed to extend the life of an impeller, even when its run dry. SpeedsealLife uses a PTFE (Teflon) washer between the pump cover plate and a rotating brass disk that makes contact with the rubber impeller. Its predecessor simply used a brass cover plate.

HOW IT WORKS

In a typical water-cooled inboard engine, the seawater pump's nitrile or neoprene impeller rubs against a stationary brass



plate (i.e. the pump housing cover) and is lubricated by the water being pumped to cool the engine. In a run-dry situation, no lubrication means the impeller will be destroyed fairly quickly (2½ minutes on average), long before the engine overtemp alarm will sound.

Tests conducted by the company show that SpeedsealLife not only offers a much-improved dry run ability, but also a 300 percent increase in impeller life under normal use.

Practical Sailor has long touted the benefits of the original Speedseal (last reviewed in the July 15, 2005 issue), so editors were keen to check out the new and improved version. We installed a SpeedsealLife kit on one of our test boats (a Union 36 sloop) powered by a 43-horsepower Beta Marine. The installation was easy and fairly fast, requiring

PS installed the SpeedsealLife on our Union 36's water pump (above). Kits (left) include four hand screws, a brass cover and washer, and a Teflon washer.

no tools or sealants. Secured with four hand screws and a nitrile O-ring, SpeedsealLife accomplishes a true engineering seal directly on the pump flange, and the O-ring replaces the paper gasket used on some pumps. The SpeedsealLife cover also means future impeller inspections will be fast and painless. Testers will be checking the Union's impeller wear and will keep you posted.

SpeedsealLife kits—available for Yanmar, Volvo, Johnson, and Jabsco pumps—cost about \$100, and Speedseal upgrade kits also are available. According to the maker, the kits come with the guarantee that any unsatisfied buyer will be given a full refund on request. ▲

CONTACT: SPEEDSEAL,
800/675-1105, www.speedseal.com

lation to be very easy. The tracks can be mounted with a few screws or adhesive.

The Right Track bags and gear holders range from \$20 to \$80, and all are guaranteed against manufacturer defects.

Bottom line: The insatiable DIYer in us sees the Right Track bags as great storage solutions that would be easy to pull off on our own with the right fabric, a sewing machine, and some bolt rope (available at some chandleries and www.sailrite.com). However, the Right Track bags are well made and durable, have good warranties, and are fairly priced, so we'd opt to feed the slacker in us and just order a few from the website. ▲

CONTACT
RIGHT TRACK, 305/262-8586, www.righttrackdesigns.com

Right Track bags' sewn-in bolt ropes (inset) mate with PVC tracks (below) that can be mounted anywhere on board, offering a versatile and mobile storage solution.

