

The Year's Best in Marine Electronics

When it comes to sailing, there's no end to the bevy of useful gadgets that can aid communication, navigation, and performance. Over the course of a year, *Practical Sailor* tests dozens of these marine electronics, and here are a few our favorites for 2010.

iPHONE NAVIGATION APPS

Navionics: With A-GPS navigation capabilities, the iPhone is a natural conduit between marine cartographers and users, and what sets it apart from other smartphones and PDAs is its library of third-party applications, or apps. Testers checked

out a few iPhone marine navigation apps for

the April 2010 issue, and found that for the price and features, Navionics is a must-have for those iPhoning-sailors.

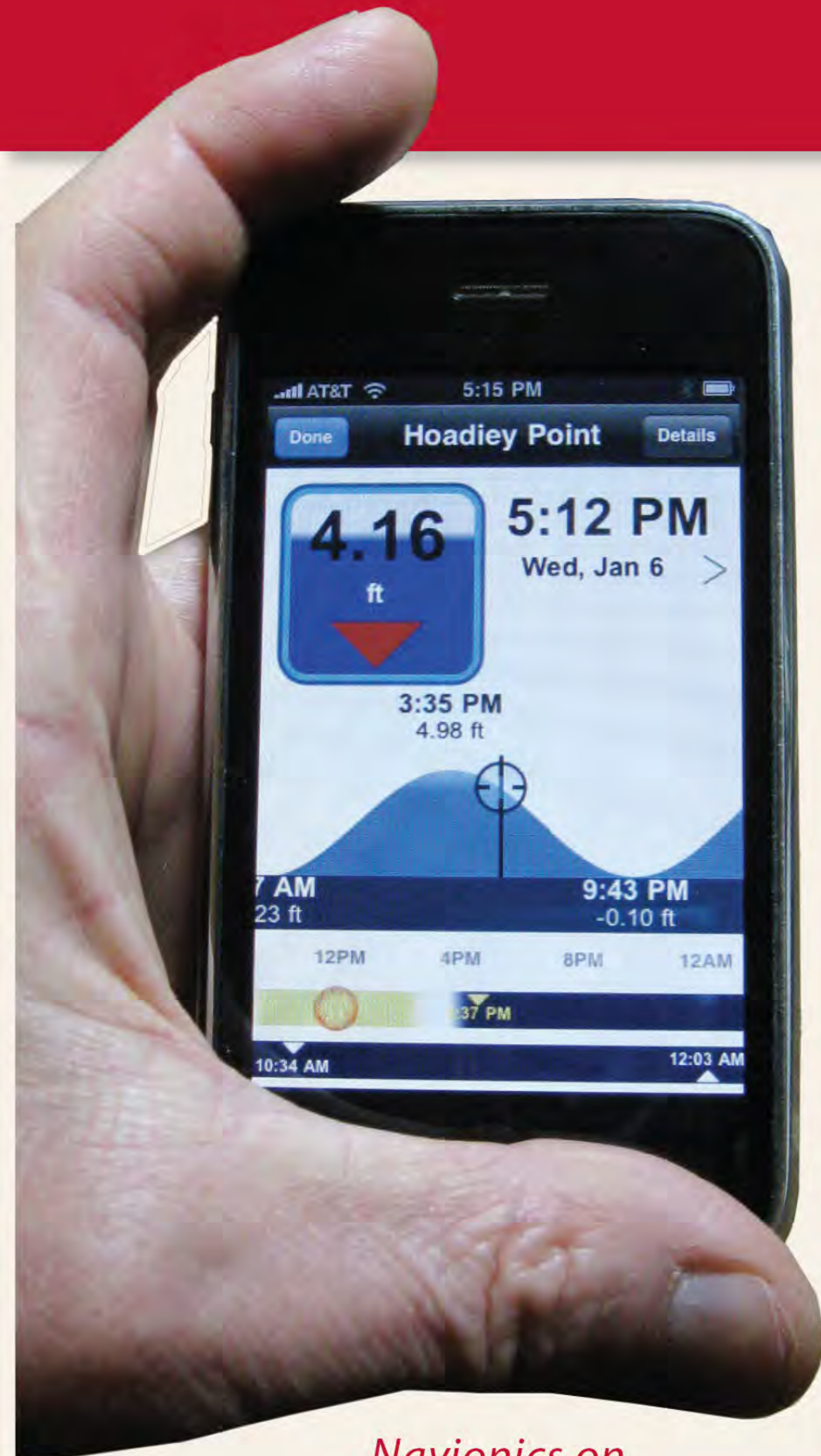
A National Marine Manufacturers Association innovation award winner, Navionics runs vector charts—derived from

Navionics' Gold XL9 Charts and from HotMaps Premium—of pretty much the whole navigable world: 28 downloadable regions covering the U.S., Canada, the Caribbean, Central America, Europe and Scandinavia, Africa, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, China, and more. Most regions cost \$10 to \$12, but some are more expensive.

Testers gave Navionics the thumbs-up—and a spot on the Gear of the Year roster—for its intuitive operation, excellent features and cartography, a good search function, and a useful help file. It also was the cheapest app tested: It runs \$10+, compared to the \$50 iNavX app and \$33 Memory-Map. (*Editor's Note: Nav apps on smartphones are not recommended as a stand-alone approach to navigation.*)

INEXPENSIVE VHF HANDHELDS

Standard Horizon HX280S: In the ever-evolving field of handheld marine VHF radios, there are many, many options to choose from, covering a range of price points, and testers are continually pitting new products against our top picks. In the December 2009 issue, we took a look at a few new waterproof devices and named a new favorite in the inexpensive category (priced under \$125).



Navionics on iPhone

GEAR OF THE YEAR

The HX280S is Standard Horizon's latest entry-level handheld; it replaces the company's HX270S, which *PS* reviewed in the October 2006 issue. The relative newbie turned in a superior performance in our bench tests, earning it the top slot for an inexpensive, submersible VHF handheld.

Facing off against the Cobra HH325VP (former Best Choice, April 2009), the HX280S's transceiver and battery life performance was top shelf, and it earned Excellent ratings for transmitter power and frequency stability, and receiver sensitivity.

The HX280S costs just \$99, making it one of the least expensive radios on the market and making it a great choice for small boaters on a budget or as backup to a primary, fixed radio.



*Standard
Horizon
HX280S*

SPEED TOOLS

Velocitek SpeedPuck: Some sailors may be content checking their performance with an occasional glance at the GPS's tally for the boat's speed over ground. For the rest, there are devices like the Velocitek SpeedPuck, a performance training tool that uses GPS satellite signals to monitor speed and performance. The SpeedPuck displays speed (maximum or maximum 10-second average), heading, and

windshifts, allowing users to judge gains and losses with every sail tweak and tack as they hone their skills.

In sea trials for the February 2010 review, the SpeedPuck was testers' favorite over Velocitek's SC-1 device and the Speedwatch, which has no GPS receiver. One of the SpeedPuck's key features is the way it presents heading data. The display offers instant feedback on slight course changes, which can also help detect wind shifts. For tweaking trim and basic training, the system works well.

The SpeedPuck was dead simple to set up, install, and use. Off the water, users can download data for evaluation on a computer (Windows).

Rugged, easy to mount and use, the SpeedPuck will make a good training tool for today's young sailors, who—for better or worse—are intrigued by all things digital. Priced at about \$340, it also will give around-the-buoy sailors the ability to quickly quantify performance without spending a small fortune.



*Velocitek
SpeedPuck*