

Gift-giving Guide

PS's holiday gift ideas—from electronics to galley wares—for the sailors on your list.

Temperatures are dropping and the winds are rising, a sign that the holidays are just over the horizon. Every November, *Practical Sailor* editors celebrate the impending season with a roundup of holiday gift ideas for the sailors on your list—or to add to your wishlist. This year's wrap-up covers a range of interests—from gifts for the green gizmo-junkie to tools for the galley god or goddess—and includes something to fit every budget.

SOLAR-SAVVY GADGETS

Eton Soultra: Made by California-based emergency radio manufacturer Eton Corp., the Soultra solar-powered sound system and charging dock for iPods and iPhones is a good solution for small boaters who don't want to install a full-blown sound system, or for anyone who doesn't want to fool with cutting holes in the cockpit for stereo speakers. The Soultra's lithium ion battery pack can be charged by solar power harvested via its single, 2-watt flip panel, or by plugging it into a standard AC outlet. The device will operate for up to seven hours in sunny or cloudy conditions, all the while charging an iPhone or iPod. With a full battery, it'll play music and charge a device for four hours—no matter the weather—offering a completely off-the-grid answer to playing DJ and keeping your iPhone charged on weekend cruises.

The Soultra's aluminum and rubberized body is splashproof (with solar panel down), and a plastic snap-in cover protects the plugged-in iPod/iPhone. Testers found the full-range 11-watt speakers to be plenty loud enough for cockpit listening underway, and the sound was better than we expected—clear and balanced. Weighing just 3½ pounds and measuring 12 by 6½ inches, the Soultra is easily portable and stowable. It also features an audio-in outlet, so it'll play music from most MP3

players, and its remote control enables users to play DJ from the cockpit while leaving the Soultra in the safety of the cabin. We found the Soultra for \$200 online, pricier than most stocking stuffers but far less expensive than installing an onboard sound system and splashproof speakers.

Solicharger: For those who don't need a portable sound system but are looking for a way to charge today's smorgasbord of electronic devices without draining the boat's batteries, check out the Sol Light Solicharger by Simply Brilliant.

Super lightweight and not much bigger than iPhone, the Solicharger (2½ ounces, 2.5 x 4.5 x .75 inches) is a portable lithium-polymer battery pack that can be juiced up via its small solar panel (100 mA output), a USB connection, a 12-volt adapter, or an AC adapter. It comes with a bevy of adapter plugs that allow users to charge any device that accepts a 5-volt output. That means, not only can you directly plug in your iPhone, some iPods, or iPod Touch to charge, but you can use the connectors to feed most handheld GPS devices, MP3 players, cell phones, and digital cameras.

The drawback: It's not waterproof. However, in our tests, we found that the solar panel charges in even the shadiest conditions and in indirect light. So tucking it away under a dodger or leaving it just inside the companionway or near a port should still allow it to fully charge. Built-in LEDs indicate whether the device is charging, when it's full, and when it's powering another device.

With a \$60 pricetag, the Solicharger's versatile charging options and ability to power communication and navigation devices—not to mention keeping the music going and pictures snapping—make it a cool, useful gift for small boaters or those gear-heads who keep their digital toys fired up onboard.



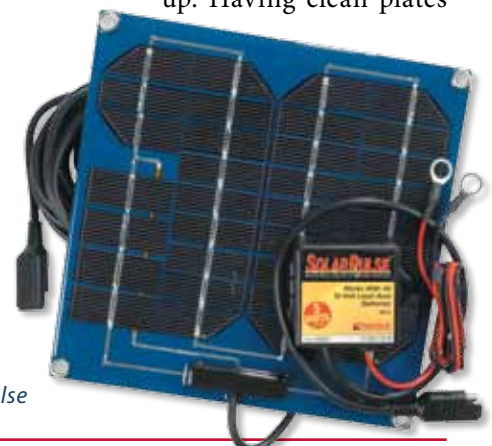
Eton Soultra with remote

PulseTech SolarPulse:

More important than keeping all those electronics charged is keeping the boat's batteries healthy and ready to go. PulseTech Products Corp., based in Texas, offers two marine-ready battery maintenance chargers—the 2-watt SP-2 and 5-watt SP-5—that do just that by using the sun's energy to charge and desulfate 12-volt batteries.

The SolarPulse chargers employ a 22-kHz DC pulse generator built into the power module, which aids in conditioning the battery. The pulses help decompose the non-conductive lead sulfate crystals that tend to crystallize on battery plates over time, convert them to active electrolytes, and inhibit additional sulfates from building up. Having clean plates

Solicharger front (top) and back (bottom) with solar panel



PulseTech SolarPulse



Sailor's Solutions remote switch

STOCKING STUFFERS

Wireless Remote Switch:

Ever dinghy out to your boat at night and the spreader lights were off, so you had to fumble with a dim flashlight while hauling provisions, your guests, and yourself aboard? Ever been

helmbound and needed to turn on the VHF or navigation lights? We have, and we can tell you that neither wishful thinking nor the "Bewitched" nose twinkle help in these situations. However, Sailor's Solutions has come up with a handy little wireless remote that can magically solve these problems

and numerous other on-board inconveniences.

The nifty device (WRS01) uses a key-fob-style remote to wirelessly switch on or off any 12-volt device that draws up to 15 amps. It works—and looks—like those little keychain remotes that unlock car doors.

The unit comes with a receiver that connects directly to the panel switch of whatever you plan to operate with the remote. It doesn't interrupt the switch's normal use, and because it has its own digital ID, the remote can be used from up to 75 yards away without interfering with other devices. The 12-volt receiver, which comes with a 15-amp inline fuse, runs off ship's batteries and draws about .005 amps.

We've not yet installed one of these, but we've already come up with several uses for the little remotes that would make life aboard

more convenient—spreader lights, nav lights, stereo. The installation instructions are straightforward, and we can't

imagine it taking longer than five minutes to get up and running.

Priced at just \$50 for the receiver and two remotes (batteries included), these make great stocking stuffers for those on short-handed boats or any captain who would likely have The Clapper installed at home. They also make great conversation pieces as people try to come up with new ways to use them.

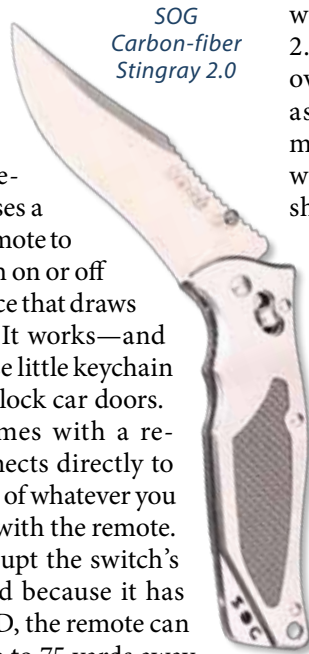
SOG Carbon-fiber Stingray 2.0:

While PS prefers fixed-blade knives like our top-rated Boye Basic 3 Cobalt for off-shore use, we also find a well-made folding knife hard to resist. So when we got our hands on the SOG Stingray 2.0 pocket knife for testing, concerns over the \$270 pricetag took a backseat as we admired the tool's 3-inch san mei blade, polished stainless handle with carbon-fiber inlay, and abalone-shell thumb stud. We know the cost puts it out of reach for many, but its high-quality construction and a limited production run make the knife a unique gift for blade enthusiasts and collectors who appreciate such things.

The Stingray 2.0, made by SOG Specialty Knives and Tools, is not only beautifully crafted, but testers also were impressed with the thick-stock blade, which is made by sandwiching three layers of steel together, similar to the way Japanese swords are crafted. It's a durable, flexible blade with good edge holding and a rock-hard core. But if you do manage to break it, no worries—it comes with a lifetime warranty.

SOG uses what it calls an "Arc-Lock" for the blade lock. Testers found it made one-handed opening and closing of the knife easy and fast, although it's not as easy if you are wearing gloves. The design also keeps fingers clear of the blade.

A hole at the base of the lightweight knife (3.6 ounces) accepts a lanyard so that users can easily attach it to a belt, safety harness, or tool bag. We prefer built-in beltclips for knives we use regularly, but the lanyard method is more secure for use on board, and SOG offers a variety of clip-on pouches (under \$10) that will fit the Stingray.



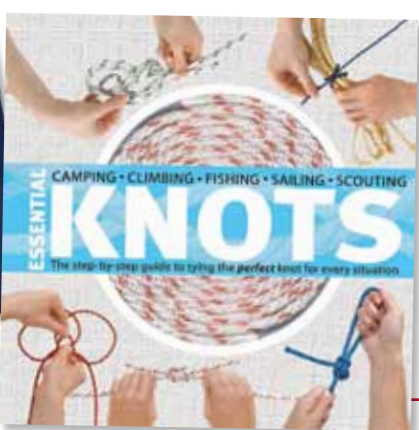
SOG Carbon-fiber Stingray 2.0

boosts battery power and performance, allowing the batteries to recharge faster, accept a deeper charge, and release more stored energy. The SolarPulse chargers, which work with all 12-volt lead acid batteries, also help prevent loss of power when a boat sits unused for long periods.

The small, lightweight, rugged solar panels are low profile and mount flush; testers found them a cinch to install. PS has not yet conducted bench tests to confirm all of the maker's claims, but our own experience with these solar pulse chargers and feedback from others has been positive.

In 2007, PS ran a short 30-day test of the SolarPulse on a Group 27 flooded lead-acid battery. At the end of approximately 20 discharge, recharge cycles, our digital conductance battery analyzer measured that the cold cranking capacity of each battery had increased about 5 percent. To get an idea of its durability, the Solar Pulse was put into the field on one of our test powerboats. A 5-watt unit has been in the sun for three years now. Apart from a faded label on the control unit, it looks and works just as it did on the day that we bought it, and the seven-year-old batteries are in excellent shape.

We found the SolarPulse online for \$100 (2 watt)-\$180 (5 watt); both carry a five-year warranty.



CHANDLERY

Galleyware drop-in dish rack



color photos to walk you through tying each one. It also comes with two lengths of rope for practicing. (They're both red and white though; we would prefer they were different

colors to make it more obvious which was which when practicing.)

The hardback book covers knots for sailing, camping, climbing, and fishing. It uses icons to show which knots are useful for specific activities, and a heading at the top of each knot's start tells what the knot is good for (for example: hoisting objects, attaching an item to a rope, etc.). Less useful but plenty entertaining is the section on rope tricks and decorative knots. If the sailor on your gift list is looking to impress the guys at the sailing club with his knot know-how or likes learning new, useful knots, this book is definitely a good choice. (Mountaineers Books, \$18.95)

GALLEY GOODIES

JetBoil Flash: It's been our experience that there's a lot of cross-over gear for camping and small-boat sailing, particularly when it comes to cooking and bathing. A new product that fits that category is the Flash, a Thermos-size appliance that combines a butane burner and cooking pot/mug in one unit, made by New Hampshire-based JetBoil. The 32-ounce cooking pot also doubles as a mug or bowl (so cleanup is limited to one dish), and everything can be stored inside the cup for a total weight of 14 ounces. The Flash caught our eye as a good solution for singlehanders or other short-handed crews looking for a quick, easy way to heat soups, tea, coffee, or any single-pot dish.

The Flash's through-

Galleyware stemless Vista (left) and nonskid (right) wine glasses



Galleyware collapsible mixing bowl (left) and colander (right)

cup ignitor lights with the push of a button, so there's no need to have your hand near the flame. Testers found that the adjustable burner boils water in just a few minutes, and a color-changing design on the mug's neoprene insulating cozy indicates when the contents are heated. The only negative we found with the cooking cup, which also is a measuring cup, was its translucent, drink-through plastic lid; we like that you can see through it, but plastic doesn't hold up very well to heat, and we'd expect it to melt eventually.

A supplied tripod adds stability, however it doesn't have the same seaworthiness as the gimballed sea-swing style stoves we've tested in the past. The 7-inch-tall Flash isn't as versatile as a single-burner stove, but it's a convenient, easy-to-use cooker for heating up that mid-watch soup or cup of tea. We found the full system online for \$100; additional cooking mugs are \$40 each.

Galleyware products: *Practical Sailor* recently checked out a sampling of the top-selling and new products from Galleyware Co., a major retailer of kitchen supplies designed for galley use on boats and in RVs. Here's a rundown of some of our favorites.

Collapsible silicone products: Silicone products are perfect for galley use as they collapse flat for compact storage and are easy to clean. The collapsible over-sink dish-drying rack (\$25) takes up very little space when stowed (6½ inches long, 12¼ inches wide, and 1½ inches tall), but when it's open,



BOATING BOOKS

"The Guide to Wooden Boats": In our holiday gift roundup, we typically include the well-known, beautifully photographed calendars of wooden boats by Benjamin Mendlowitz and Maynard Bray. This year, we're suggesting the duo's coffee-table book, "The Guide to Wooden Boats." First published in 1997, the book was released this year for the first time in paperback. As with the calendars, the book features the photography of the talented Mendlowitz with supporting text by Bray, a marine historian.

Rather than being simply eye candy for wooden-boat buffs, the book also gives the 101 information on different types of boats (cats, yawls, cutters, etc.) and an introduction to each specific boat pictured.

The book offers a great escape from a landlocked winter and would be a welcome addition to any mariner's library. (W.W. Norton & Co., \$19.95)

"Essential Knots": A sailor can get by with knowing only a handful of the really necessary knots, but inevitably there arises a situation when none of the old standbys work. Rather than falling back on the old "if you can't tie a knot, tie a lot" strategy, we prefer to while away watches practicing knot-tying and expanding our knot knowledge by studying how-to guides and watching videos on www.animatedknots.com.

Our pick for a study book this season is "Essential Knots: The Step-by-Step Guide to Tying the Perfect Knot for Every Situation" by Neville Olliffe and Madeleine Rowles-Olliffe, both members of the International Guild of Knot Tyers.

The practical guide details step-by-step instructions for 85 knots and uses



Broken Barnacle

Single-fluke anchor snaps under pressure.

The editors at *Practical Sailor* get a few reports of broken anchors each year. Typically, these are failed fluke welds on Danforth-style designs or bent shanks on plough-types. The experience of Ted Goodwin, whose 43-pound cast aluminum Barnacle anchor catastrophically broke on the Bahama Bank earlier this year, is fortunately quite rare.

In terms of tensile strength and reliability, it is hard to beat a high-quality drop-forged



steel anchor. Although some of the most highly regarded anchors are investment cast steel (the original Bruce anchor, for example), the tensile strength depends greatly on both the design and the quality of the casting.

As many anchor manufacturers move their production facilities to Asia, *Practical Sailor* has become concerned about the quality of cast-metal anchors. Lightweight alloy materials such as aluminum can further compromise the integrity of a cast anchor, with potentially disastrous consequences, as Goodwin's story reveals.

Goodwin was anchored on the Bahama Banks in 8 feet of water with at least 7:1 scope out and 3/8-inch chain rode with a long nylon snubber. When a 4 a.m. squall rolled through, the boat lurched violently to the right and began blowing downwind. Deploying their back up anchor stopped the dragging af-

Ted Goodwin's aluminum anchor (below left), clearly marked "Barnacle," closely resembles the steel version PS tested in 2007 (above left). Goodwin's anchor broke while his Island Packet 35 (above) was anchored in the Bahamas.

ter 300 yards. When Goodwin retrieved the Barnacle in the morning, its single fluke was missing completely.

A close inspection of the broken section reveals a hollow area with a relatively thin wall thickness at the location of the break. *Practical Sailor* tested a steel Barnacle in 2007, but we could not locate the company recently, and the anchor appears to be out of production. These anchors can still be found on chandlery shelves, however. Based on Goodwin's experience and our inspection of the break, the aluminum version of the Barnacle anchor is one we would avoid. ▲

it's large enough to handle most dishes, including plates up to 10 inches in diameter. The dish rack's adjustable sides slide out to seat onto the sink's edges so that the dishes can be drying even underway. It holds eight plates and has a collapsible flatware tray for vertical drying.

Collapsible mixing bowls and colanders are available in several sizes from 1.5 to 5 quarts and range in price from \$10 to \$13. Both of these space-savers also feature easy-pour spouts and non-skid bases.

These will make great gifts for anyone with a galley, and they also come in handy at home.

Non-breakable drinkware: Galleyware sells a variety of cups and glasses made to withstand life onboard and minimize spills. We tried the non-skid

wine glasses (4/\$26) and the Vista line of stemless wine glasses (small \$6, large \$6.25). The 12-ounce "unbreakable" non-skid glasses are made of BPA-free Lexan polycarbonate and come with lifetime warranties. A plastic ring covers the rim of the base and is designed to keep the glass in place up to 20 degrees of heel. In tests, we had no spills at 20 degrees, but anything higher turned the wine glass into a tumbler. The polycarbonate Vista stemless glasses also are guaranteed unbreakable, and having no stem, they're much more difficult to tip over. The small glasses measure 4 inches tall, while the large measures 5½.

Non-breakable drinkware is a good gift for any boat owner who enjoys hosting cocktail hour. ▲

CONTACTS

ETON CORP., 650/903-3866, www.etoncorp.com

GALLEYWARE CO., 302/996-9480, www.galleyware.com

JETBOIL COOKING SYSTEMS, 888/611-9905, www.jetboil.com

PULSETECH, 817/329-6099, www.pulsetech.net

SAILOR'S SOLUTIONS, 631/754-1945, www.sailorssolutions.com

SIMPLY BRILLIANT, 888/557-6464, www.sollight.com

SOG SPECIALTY KNIVES, 425/771-6230, www.sogknives.com

W.W. NORTON & CO., 212/354-5500, www.wwnorton.com