

Beverage Holders

A roundup of products to help your drinks get into the swing of things.

We've spilled our share of drinks on board, and while it's a shame to see a fresh drink go to waste, some beverages can stain cushions and decks. Drink holders can help minimize on-board spills, but there are a million types marketed to boat owners—from basic lifeline-mounted wire baskets to expensive Starboard or teak binnacle boxes. To find out which is most effective, *Practical Sailor* field tested a sampling from several manufacturers.

WHAT WE TESTED

Drink holders come in many designs for cockpit and belowdecks mounting. We like having a binnacle box that can hold electronics, sunscreen, and drinks, but none were included in this test group although SnapIt and other manufacturers offer them. Three of the 10 products we tested were of the old-style, gimballed wire basket variety that hang from a lifeline. Updated designs attach easier than the old-school products and are shorter, keeping them from fouling a lower lifeline or banging against a toerail.

We also evaluated a handful of rail- or pulpit-mountable holders made of stainless and Starboard (high-density polyethylene); three binnacle-mounted products that can accommodate multiple drinks or gear (binoculars, GPS, etc.); and two products designed to mount on vertical surfaces like a bulkhead.

All of the test products were capable of holding a canned or bottled beverage and a canned drink in an insulated sleeve (aka koozie, coolie, hugger, etc.). The majority of them also can hold mugs.

Manufacturers represented in this test included Edson International, Orbex, Handi-Man Marine, Sea-Fit Inc., and SnapIt Products. Massachusetts-based Edson, well-known for its quality ma-



While many of the tested drink holders will hold a beer can or bottle, a water bottle is a wiser choice while underway. Lifeline-mounted drink holders like the (from left) Sail-a-long, SnapIt, and Sail-Buoy are well-suited to cockpits tight on space.

rine pumps and steering systems, makes a high-end line of drink holders that are attractive but pricey. Orbex, a wholesaler, offers less-expensive drink holders made in China. Handi-Man Marine, based in Wisconsin, also manufactures marine fasteners, storage solutions, and stainless products. Headquartered in Texas, SnapIt makes marine accessories for power and sailboats, while the New Orleans-based Sea-Fit specializes in rigging industry products.

HOW WE TESTED

All of the drink holders were field-tested underway and at the dock. To evaluate corrosion resistance, testers sprayed them with salt water, and let them sit. No product showed signs of corrosion during testing, but those that use plated steel likely will succumb to rust after a season of use.

Each drink holder was mounted and un-mounted to gauge ease of installation, and was used during day trips and short

cruises to review ease of use and performance. Testers tried each with canned drinks, glass and plastic cups, mugs, wine glasses, and cans in koozies.

Final ratings considered the variety of drink containers the holder could accommodate, the number of mounting options, construction, and price.

LIFELINE MOUNTED

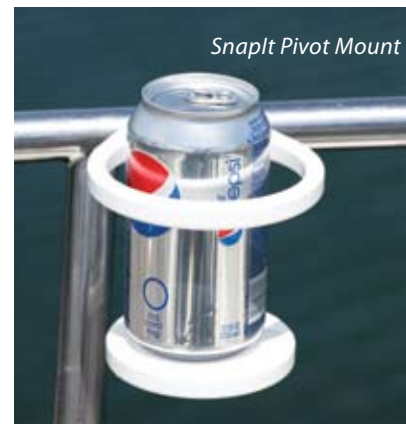
If you're looking for a drink holder for a boat that has limited cockpit space, a lifeline-mounted product is one of the better choices. These are the easiest to install as they simply hook over a lifeline, and can be stowed away when not in use. We tested three: the SnapIt, Orbex Sail-Buoy, and the Handi-Man Sail-a-Long.

The Sail-Buoy was nixed from testing after it jumped ship during a seatrial. The wire basket hung from the lifeline via a rather open plastic hook. The hook remained on the lifeline, but the basket

Photos by Gene Smith



Edson Single Mount



SnapIt Pivot Mount

AS VALUE GUIDE DRINK HOLDERS

| MAKER | MODEL | PRICE/WARRANTY | MOUNTING OPTIONS | RATINGS | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| | | | | CORROSION RESISTANCE | EASE OF USE/INSTALL | VERSATILITY* | CONSTRUCTION QUALITY |
| ORBEX | Sail-Buoy (700302) | \$20 / Retailers | Lifeline | NA | NA | Good*** | Poor (Jumped ship) |
| HANDI-MAN MARINE ✓ | Sail-a-Long | \$16 / Retailers | Lifeline | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent** | Excellent (Stainless / steel) |
| SNAP-IT | V0016 (Lifeline) | \$15 / Lifetime | Lifeline | Excellent | Excellent | Good*** | Excellent (Poly) |
| EDSON | Single (878WH-1) | \$60 / 1 year | Pulpit, rail | Excellent | Good | Excellent** | Excellent (Stainless / poly) |
| SNAP-IT ✓ | V003K (Pivoting) | \$25 / Lifetime | Pulpit, rail | Excellent | Excellent | Good*** | Excellent (Poly) |
| EDSON | Triple, poly (878WH-3-95) | \$140 / 1 year | Binnacle | Excellent | Good | Excellent** | Excellent (Stainless / poly) |
| EDSON | Double, teak (878TK-2-125) | \$161 / 1 year | Binnacle | Excellent | Good | Excellent** | Excellent (teak, stainless) |
| SNAP-IT ✓ | V005 (Binnacle) | \$55 / Lifetime | Binnacle | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent** | Excellent (Poly) |
| ORBEX | Bar-Buoy (700500) | \$14 / Retailers | Flat vertical surfaces | Fair | Good | Excellent** | Fair (plastic and plated steel) |
| SEA-FIT ✓ | Adjustable (84012BK) | \$10 / Retailers | Flat vertical surface | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent** | Good (plastic) |

✓ Recommended * All can be used with koozies. **Can hold cans, bottles, and mugs. *** Can hold cans and bottles.

(and the beer that was in it) was MIA after a short time underway.

The SnapIt lifeline holder, like all SnapIt products tested, is machined from solid, UV-resistant Starboard. Simple and rugged, it snugly hooks over the lifeline and swings by a long, grooved hook. Its multi-axis swinging keeps most of the beverage in the container. The closed holding ring is designed for cans or bottles in a koozie but not mugs.

The Sail-a-Long stainless wire holder is simple, inexpensive, and able to hold drinks in cans, mugs, koozies, or bottles. The hanging wire, which swings on all axes, is bent to prevent the holder from jumping loose in a rough sea.

Bottom line: Both the Sail-a-Long and SnapIt lifeline holders are quality

products. We gave Sail-a-Long the slight edge only because it can hold mugs and the SnapIt cannot.

RAIL OR PULPIT MOUNTED

Having a drink holder installed on a pulpit, stanchion, or railing keeps beverages within reach but out of the cockpit, where the action is and spills are more likely. This style of holder is particularly useful on boats with stern/pulpit seating. We tested tube-mounted single-drink holders from Edson and SnapIt.

Like all of Edson's drink holders, the single comes with an open-frame holding ring of 316 stainless and a base of teak or Starboard. We tested the stainless and poly version on an angled pulpit tube. While we like the look of teak, we shy

away from unnecessarily adding to our wood maintenance regimen. Starboard is UV and weather resistant and requires no maintenance.

The Edson holder attaches via marine-grade stainless hardware; a threaded stud and a locator stud

keep it from moving. Mounting it, as with all of the Edson products, required a wrench and an Allen key.

In tests, the Edson securely held cans, large cups, koozies, and even mugs thanks to its open-frame holding ring. The downside of the open-frame metal ring is that, depending on where it's mounted, it can snag clothing and sheets or lines.

With a base and closed holding ring made of Starboard, the SnapIt pivoting, single holder is designed to be mounted on angled tubes. Because it pivots and can be ordered to fit various sizes of tubing, it's extremely versatile and can be installed on vertical or horizontal tubes. SnapIt includes a U clamp and stainless fasteners to permanently mount the pivoting holder. Installation was much easier than the Edson single mount and required only a screwdriver.

Bottom line: Edson's holders are high-quality and high-priced. If the sleek design fits your needs, then paying twice what you would for the SnapIt may be worth considering. However, the SnapIt gets our recommendation in the single-holder group based on price, warranty, and the fact the holding ring doesn't snag clothes or lines.



Orbex Bar-Buoy



Sea-Fit Adjustable



Edson Triple Starboard Binnacle Mount



Edson Double Teak Binnacle Mount



SnapIt Binnacle Mount

BINNACLE MOUNTED

Binnacle-mounted drink holders are ideal for boats with roomy enough cockpits and wheel steering. They require a bit more effort to install and are usually permanently mounted, but they keep drinks within arm's reach of the captain and crew. (They also make a handy spot to stash sunscreen or binos.) Both Edson and SnapIt make a variety of pedestal-mountable drink holders that accommodate two to four beverages and gear.

Edson's binnacle-mount, multi-drink holders are constructed the same as the single holder, but they come with cast stainless brackets for mounting to the pedestal guard tubes. We tested the double, teak-base and triple, Starboard-base drink holders.

Testers found the installations more difficult than with any of the other mounts. One method of securing the units calls for users to drill holes in the pedestal guard. This wasn't an option on our test boat, so we followed Edson's instructions to change the factory position of the clamp mounting screws using a wrench and an Allen key. However, this setup left the heavy holder canting forward and wobbling with the seas. Another assembly hiccup was the two-piece bushings Edson supplied. Be forewarned: The bushings are a bit fragile; testers snapped two squeezing them around the rails in our test installation.

Once installed, the Edson drink holders held drinks well, but like the single holder, their open-face rings had a tendency to snag loose clothing.

The SnapIt pedestal-mounted holder we tested holds four drinks, including two mugs, or two drinks and a pair of binoculars. Made of Starboard with stainless fasteners, it fared better than the Edsons in ease of installation ratings as no

drilling is required for mounting; it snaps directly on to the pedestal with the setting of a few screws.

The SnapIt has no open holding rings that can snag passing crew or lines.

Bottom line: Edson's binnacle-mount drink holders are elegant, but cost and added installation steps hold them back. Though its plastic appearance may not appeal to all, the SnapIt offers more space for stowing your cocktails at a fraction of the price, and mounting the unit is a snap; it gets our recommendation in this category.

BULKHEAD

PS tested two products that fit belowdecks and bulkhead drink-holder needs: Orbex's Bar-Buoy gimbaled basket and Sea-Fit's folding holder with adjustable-arms. Neither of these is high on fashion, but they get function points for versatility and price. Both require that holes be drilled for bulkhead mounting.

The ABS plastic Sea-Fit's adjustable arms can hold everything from a koozied can to a wine glass. Available in black or white, the holder folds flat when it's not in use.

Testers found it fairly easy to mount, requiring only three screws to be set. It also performed surprisingly well during sea trials.

The Bar-Buoy, which comes with its own koozie, is a plastic basket set on a plated-steel gimballing bracket. The bracket can be mounted on any flat surface, and a rail-mount bracket is available (\$3). Brackets can be bought separately, so users can install multiple mounts to use with one holder and can purchase replacements when the steel begins to corrode.

Though the Bar-Buoy was easy to mount during tests, its basket had a tendency to come loose from the bracket any time it was bumped.

Bottom line: Both are inexpensive, but the folding, adjustable Sea-Fit has it over the Bar-Buoy.

CONCLUSION

If ease of installation is a top concern or cockpit space is minimal, then a lifeline-mounted holder is the way to go. Our favorite in this test was the Sail-a-Long.

Boat owners with a binnacle likely would prefer one of the multi-drink holders. The Edson binnacle mounts are stylish and high-quality, but the SnapIt gets the thumbs up for easy installation.

Rail- and pulpit-mounted holders keep the clutter out of the cockpit and are the most versatile of the bunch. Our top pick in that group was the SnapIt. We recommend the Sea-Fit for bulkhead mounting applications.

And finally, any article on drink holders would be remiss if it didn't remind readers to drink responsibly, particularly while underway. Alcohol can impair judgment, and penalties for operating a boat under the influence can be very serious. ▲

CONTACTS

EDSON MARINE, 508/995-9711
www.edsonmarine.com

ORBEX, www.westmarine.com

SEA-FIT INC.
504/736-9477, www.sea-fit.com

HANDI-MAN, 800/654-7977,
www.handimanmarine.com

SNAPIT PRODUCTS, 903/965-9181
www.marine.snapitproducts.com