

MAILPORT



TRIGGER TETHER

To keep from being pulled under in a collision between a tanker and my sailboat, I “pulled the ripcord” to release the snap shackle on my Standard West Marine Safety Tether. The tether release lanyard was outfitted with a series of balls. (See bottom photo at right.)

I had rehearsed reaching for and feeling the release toggle many times so it would come naturally in an emergency. The balls have a distinct feel. There was nothing on my PFD or foul-weather jacket that resembled them.

The replacement tether I bought from West Marine (ISAF Specification Safety Tether, No. 9553504) has a new toggle on the snap-shackle release lanyard that consists of an open triangle of plastic. This is dangerous, in my opinion! In my first few hours of using the new tether, in moderate sea conditions, I managed to snag the triangular loop on something and release the snap shackle. I am now replacing all triangular loop pulls with bead pulls that I have crafted myself.

Jack Durham
!YO VIVO!, Alberg 35
Kaneohe, Hawaii

The task of designing an unyielding snap shackle that is easy to unhook in the water poses a vexing challenge for tether designers. Our own in-the-water testing (PS August 2008 and September 2009) found the balls to be hard to grip and pull under load, particularly when wearing gloves. We have not yet tested the harnesses with the looped lanyard attached to the snap shackle release. West Marine worked with Kong, an Italian hardware company that makes a range of safety gear items for emergency services and alpine rescue crews, to come up with its two ISAF Safety Harness Tethers. According to Chuck



Reader Jack Durham, here aboard his Alberg 35, is retrofitting the pull cord on his new West Marine tether (top) with beads to resemble his older WM tether model (bottom).

Hawley, vice president of product development at West Marine, the company wanted a reliable means to trigger the snap shackle, even with gloves, under extreme conditions. “We’re not sure if there is a perfect solution, since one sailor’s ‘easy to release’ is another sailor’s ‘too easy to release,’” Hawley said. “We appreciate the feedback from the customer, as always, as it helps us make better products over time.”

TOP SECRET TOPSIDES

I just found out about a product you might like to test: Top Secret Coatings, www.topsecretcoatings.com. Its website talks like it is the cure all for all topside coatings and bottom painting. Is it too good to be true? I’m curious about it, and I hope you might be to.

Peter Koehler
1981 Catalina
Nahant, Mass.

According to Top Secret Coatings, the company has been supplying paints to the government for years, and only recently branched into the marine retail market. Like you, we’re curious to see whether the company’s coatings live up to their claims. We’ve requested products from Top Secret and plan to put its antifouling and topside paints into the testing rotation. Stay tuned.

LED VS. AMPS

Your September 2009 article on LED bulbs for bulkhead lights caught my attention. I’ve taken the non-scientific approach to the LED brightness vs. amp-draw quest. I have a 2000 Catalina 400 MkII with 33 bulbs belowdecks, and out of the 33 bulbs, there are four types (festoon, G4, wedge base, and bayonet). Simply put, the brightness was fine, but not the amp draw. So, my objective was to duplicate the warm glow of the lights with the lowest amp-draw possible (LEDs).

The article stated that the Imtra ILGU5.3 MR16 cool 3-watt generates

PRACTICAL SAILOR ONLINE

For those who have not yet taken the online survey about sailing schools, November is your last chance to tell us about your experiences with adult schools or destination schools for children. If you are considering going to a school, we would like to hear about your preferences and expectations. A link to the survey is at the top of the *Practical Sailor* homepage, www.practical-sailor.com. It takes less than 5 minutes to complete and is open to subscribers and non-subscribers, so encourage friends to participate.



The Cetol-finished teak trim on reader George Braun's Morris Annie, looking fresh in this picture, is ready for a re-coat. We recommend sanding rather than stripping or a heat gun-scraper routine.

111 lumens, draws 0.34 amps, and costs \$28. I have installed 13 of Superbright-LEDs' G4B-WWHP10D LEDs, which generate 111 lumens cool white each or 98 lumens warm white each. The cool white draws 0.205 amps, and the warm white draws 0.195 amps. My preference is the warm white.

My recommendation is to check out www.superbrightleds.com, compare prices and specs. Their LEDs have exceeded my expectations, and I have not experienced any problems.

Olav N. Pedersen
Midnight Sun (Hull #171),
2000 Catalina 400 Mk II
Kemah, Texas

Thanks for the tip. The LEDs you mention are similar to bulbs tested for our in-depth report on LED interior lighting in January 2009. These bulbs were fine for general illumination, but were not the best for reading (our criteria for that test). As our test found, published specs can be misleading. If you do want to shop around for bulbs, be sure to compare warranty and return policies. Our long-term test of LED replacement bulbs is ongoing, and an LED nav light test is on the horizon.

TOUGH BOOTS AND CETOL

The October 2009 article on sea boots reminded me that a few years ago, some fishing boots—I think from Alaska—that were mentioned in *PS* as being quite acceptable for sailing and quite inexpensive compared to the \$200 pairs now recommended. Do you remember

what these were?

Also, the Cetol on my boat needs re-coating. Is it OK to sand-off the old, multiple, peeling coats, or do I need to use a heat gun and scraper?

George Braun
Jeanne Marie, Morris Annie No. 9
Greenport, N.Y.

We believe the boots you're referring to were recommended by a reader in the July 2000 Mailport: XtraTuf fishing boots (www.xtratufboots.com). While we have not yet tested these, PS contributors Beth Leonard and Evans Starzinger used them on their high-latitude cruise. The couple said the boots have great nonskid and rated them well for normal spring/summer/fall sailing. However, the boots were not warm enough for extreme cold. Our September 2002 test also included some inexpensive basic boots.

As for your Cetol: We assume you used the Cetol clear gloss overcoat. If the finish is peeling, removal should not be too difficult. One of the beautiful things about the synthetic teak treatments vs. a urethane varnish is that they are not as hard, so they require less work to remove.

Sanding with 80 grit to start (and then sanding with finer grit up to 220 before re-coating) should be enough to get it off without taking the teak too far

down. Regular re-coats (before it starts to peel) should require only light sanding.

There are also chemical strippers available that may take some of the elbow grease out of the take-down, but we've never used any on teak. Strippers should be used with serious caution around any painted surfaces or non-coated fiberglass, and be sure the stripper is thoroughly rinsed from the wood; residue will cause adhesion problems.

If you're looking for a new product to re-coat with, check out the results of our long-term exterior wood finishes test at the one-year mark in the next issue.

DE-CLUTTERING AIS

Your September 2009 article on Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) referred to an issue, which according to my research, is an Internet myth—that AIS-B targets can be “de-cluttered” from a target display. From what I have found, Class-A AIS (commercial) systems are prohibited by regulation from filtering targets based upon being Class A vs. Class B; and the ACR Nauticast Class-B transceiver I installed last winter also has no such capability.

Speaking of my ACR Nauticast, your article mentioned VHF splitters. I connected a Comar AST-100 active VHF splitter designed for Class-B AIS transceivers to my masthead antenna 56 feet above the water. I am seeing AIS targets 48 nautical miles away regularly, and last weekend I was tracking a freighter that was 69 nm away. It does not interfere with my voice VHF at all and my voltage standing wave ratio (VSWR) meter is happy on both radios. There also was absolutely no change in satellite signals for the AIS or my GPS.

Finally, it cannot be overemphasized that in restricted visibility conditions, AIS is no substitute for radar. I was very



ACR Nauticast

PFD Laws and Shocking Sails

Several states aim to strengthen their life jacket laws or have already passed new, more stringent regulations regarding personal flotation devices (PFDs).

The dramatic increase in boating-related fatalities during winter months sparked New York state's recent seasonal mandate. Starting this fall, from Nov. 1 to May 1, anyone aboard a boat shorter than 21 feet—all pleasure craft, with or without an engine—must wear a Coast Guard-approved PFD. The N.Y. Department of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation will enforce the law, and violators will face fines ranging from \$25 to \$100.

In Maryland, children younger than 7 are currently required to don a life jacket while underway on boats less than 21 feet. Legislators and the Department of Natural Resources are trying to raise the age limit from 7 to 13 years old.

This recent push to change the regulation came in the wake of more than a dozen boating fatalities in Maryland waterways in 2009, including the death of an 11-year-old girl who was not wearing a life jacket.

At presstime, the bill was still awaiting General Assembly approval. But, as it has

the endorsement of law enforcement and the state's governor, it is expected to pass.

A JOLTING CAUTION

Following its closure in August, the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal was re-opened in mid-September on a case-by-case basis for boats longer than 20 feet. Small boats, personal watercraft, and sailboats without motors are still prohibited from travelling through the area. To receive permission to pass through, call the onsite Coast Guard at 630/336-0296 or hail them on VHF Channel 16.

About 30 miles from Chicago, the waterway—between markers 296.0 and 296.7—was closed and a safety zone was established to protect boaters from possible electric shock due to the newly increased operating parameters of the Electric Fish Dispersal Barrier. The Electric Fish Dispersal Barrier, which was constructed to keep invasive fish species out of the Great Lakes, was initially operated at 1 volt per inch, but was increased to 2 volts per inch to repel juvenile or other smaller invasive fish.

When passing through the safety



Maryland officials aim to raise the age for requiring children to wear PFDs from 7 to 13 years old.

zone, the Coast Guard suggests remaining seated and avoiding contact with anything outside the boat's hull, any metal object unnecessary for navigation, and any water outside of the vessel or standing inside it. Boaters entering the canal should either closely supervise children and pets, or send them belowdecks. Boaters are also advised not to linger near the barrier.

For updates on the status of the safety zone, go to www.uscg.fishbarrierinfo.com or call 216/902-6020 or 312/846-5330.

disappointed to discover that the Maine State ferries frequently plying Penobscot Bay, which are our most dangerous target in the fog, are not AIS equipped. When I queried the skipper I discovered they only rate 260 tons and thus are not required to have AIS. Since being hit by one would ruin anyone's day, it made me realize that 300 tons is really big, and there are plenty of things out there that are big enough, quiet enough, and fast enough to be scary without triggering the mandatory AIS requirement.

Charlie Freeman
Kamaloha, 1988 Tayana 37 No. 542

Your last point is the main reason for our cautions regarding AIS systems, an excellent, but not infallible aid to collision avoidance. According to an

alert issued by the U.S. Coast Guard in October 2008: "Although all Class A [commercial] devices will receive Class B [recreational] information; unfortunately, some older Class A models [pre-2005] are unable to render this information on their Minimum Keyboard and Display (MKD) or may only have available the Class B vessel's dynamic data (i.e. position, course and speed) but not its static data (i.e. vessel name, call-sign). Therefore, the Coast Guard cautions new AIS Class B users to not assume that they are being 'seen' by all other AIS users or that all their information is available to all Class A users."

For a list of the USCG-approved AIS-A devices that require a software update to properly display AIS-B info, visit www.navcen.uscg.gov/enav/AIS. Another resource on this topic is the

130-page International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities guidelines, [www.navcen.uscg.gov/enav/ais/IALA_AIS_Guidelines_Vol1_Pt1_OPS_\(1.3\).pdf](http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/enav/ais/IALA_AIS_Guidelines_Vol1_Pt1_OPS_(1.3).pdf).

USCG AIS Regulatory Project Officer Jorge Arroyo shed a little more light on the need for some AIS-A to be updated in order for the new regulations to be met: "New international navigation presentation standards applicable to radar, ARPA, Electronic Chart Display and Information Systems (ECDIS), Electronic Chart Systems (ECS), Chartplotters, etc. allow 'filtering'— by target range, CPA/TCPA [Closest Point of Approach] or AIS target class (either A or B) of sleeping AIS targets. [A sleeping AIS target icon indicates the presence of a vessel equipped with AIS, however, no additional information is presented



Paul Herer's J-100, *Whaat's Up*, catches a fresh breeze in the fresh water off Illinois.

until the AIS target is activated.]

"However, the filter process used to limit the number of displayed targets should ensure that priority is given to showing those that have an impact on the safety of own ship. Additionally, sleeping AIS targets must be automatically activated (become active AIS targets) when they meet user-defined parameters—target range, CPA/TCPA, or AIS class, etc. This said, AIS-A requirements for MKDs do not allow for such filtering. So although, the display of AIS B targets may be filtered under certain circumstances, you are not invisible because MKD's are required to display the bearing and range of all AIS targets.

"This is a relatively new standard, thus many ships have yet to outfit or update their equipment accordingly. Likewise, and unfortunately, many ships have yet to update their existing equipment to recognize AIS Class B units at all.

"Traditionally, manufacturers have done this filtering unbeknownst to the consumer; very few systems can process over 200 targets at a time. The way the new standard was developed was to

allow the user/consumer a say on how and what is to be filtered and when."

BEP TANK TENDER

It was nice to find the BEP TS1 on your list of Gear of the Year (September 2009), but I believe you may have done a disservice by not pointing out that the sender is fully programmable. It can be programmed to emulate virtually any sender type, and can thus be used with any in-place gauge system. I discovered this on my own, and have now ordered one to replace my now-twice-fouled WEMA sender. It can also be programmed to allow for excellent accuracy in odd-shaped tanks. Well worth the under-\$200 cost of the sensor alone.

Cary Stotland
Via e-mail

FRESHWATER ANTIFOULING

I must take issue with the article on bottom paints in the October 2009 issue. You rate the VC 17m and VC 17m Extra "Fair" and "Poor." It seems you tested these freshwater products in salt water. I have used both of these paints for many years in Lake Michigan and have found them to be quite effective.

I feel the test for any product needs to be done in the application and environment for which it has been intended.

Paul Herer
Whaat's Up, J-100, Hull No. 6
Waukegan, Ill.

We've tested paints in fresh water several times and found that our comparative rankings in fresh water broadly correlate with those in salt water. However, since freshwater species are generally less aggressive, less-potent freshwater paints that fall short in salt water do much better in fresh water. Biocide potency is an important consideration for freshwater boaters, particularly those on small lakes, since this environment is a more "closed" reservoir for biocides like copper that leach out of antifouling paints.

PS encourages freshwater boaters to use hard paints that have no more biocide than required to combat slime and

hard growth. Interlux's VC-17m Extra and Pettit's SR-21 freshwater paints are fine for this application, particularly if you race. Both repelled growth after a season in Lake Erie in our last freshwater test in 2007. Both, however, use the anti-slime agent Irgarol, a pesticide that is tightly regulated or banned as an antifouling agent in some places outside the U.S.

SAILING VIDEO GAMES

I would like to purchase new simulator software for this winter. How about doing a fresh review of what is available? (Last review was June 2003.)

Here are a few to check out: VirtualSkipper5, 21st Century Sailing Simulator, HMS Surprise, Sailing 2000, Sail Simulator 5, Posey Yacht Design, Stentec Software, Sailx.com, and Virtual Passages.

Dave Esme
O'Day 23
Peoria, Ill.

We're game. If you have a favorite sailing video game or sailing game website, let us know about it at practicalsailor@belvoirpubs.com.

STUFFING BOX CLARIFICATION

In the Mailport section of the December 2008 issue, a letter recommends stuffing-box packing from "U-Tek Corp." I've searched everywhere but cannot find this company. Thoughts?

Dr. Gary Deangelis
Via e-mail

We apologize for the mixup. The company is Utex, not U-Tek, and the website is www.utexind.com. You can find information on packing material at www.utexind.com/products/compressionpacking/.

Practical Sailor welcomes letters from our readers. Please include your name, home port, boat type, and boat name. Send e-mail to practicalsailor@belvoirpubs.com and mail to *Practical Sailor*, 7820 Holiday Dr. S., Suite 315, Sarasota, FL 34231.

Photos courtesy of Rick McCowan (top) and Ernst Niebur (bottom)

ACADIA SAILS

I would like to thank Acadia Sails (207/244-5722) in Southwest Harbor, Maine, and encourage anyone in the area to use them.

We were in the middle of a three-week trip up the Maine coast and were starting to head back home. We were motor-sailing with the mainsail fully deployed and were caught in a squall that quickly passed through the area. Our mainsail shredded along the leach before I could drop it. Needless to say, we were looking at sailing the remaining distance home with just a jib—not something we were looking forward to with some beautiful sailing days ahead. I called Acadia Sails as we were passing through, and to my surprise, they agreed to drop what they were doing and repair my sails the next day. I cannot thank them enough! We had a fantastic sail home!

Rick McCowan
Breezes, 1998 Sabre 402
Mattapoisett, Mass.

TRIPLE PLAY

This summer, my forestay parted and my furler fell into the water. In trying to figure out the cause, I disassembled the drum and lost some of the bearings. I called Tom at Cruising Design Inc. in Homer, N.Y., (www.sailcdi.com) for replacements. Even though the unit was out of warranty and the failure was not the fault of the furler, he sent me the necessary bearings at no charge.

I then contacted Nate at North Sails (www.northsails.com) to get a replacement stay. Even though the product was out of warranty, he quickly set me up with Bam Miller at Oyster Bay Boat Shop (www.oysterbayboatshop.com), who made me a new stay in record time. Nate made a follow-up call to me a few weeks later to be sure I was satisfied with the work. Even though my travails were small potatoes, I was given first-class service by all three businesses.

Larry Abbott
Windchime, Coronado 23
Bayside, Northport, Maine

HENRI LLOYD

Several years ago, I bought a pair of Henri Lloyd sea boots. The boots spent most of their time in a locker. They were used only a few times, but always served me well.

Earlier this year, I noticed that a seam on one of the boots was opening. I could still wear it since the liner was intact, but something needed to be done. I e-mailed Henri Lloyd (www.henrilloyd.com) about any recommendation for a glue. Within a day, I received an apology that I was experiencing a problem with their product and another apology that they could not recommend a glue. Instead, they offered to replace the years-old rubber boots for free!

It got even better: Henri Lloyd asked me if it was OK if the boot replacements were delayed a few months since the company was changing its model line. A few months later, I received another email, informing me that the company no longer offered rubber boots and asking whether I would accept leather boots instead. I was thrilled! To make a long story short, Henri Lloyd had two different models of leather boots sent to me (from England) so I could choose which one I liked better, and they paid return postage for the other pair.

I was blown away by this extraordinary example of customer service. I would have been perfectly happy with a recommendation for a glue to fix my old rubber boots myself. Instead, I now have a pair of top-of-the-line leather boots that are far superior to my original boots.

Henri Lloyd not only stood behind their product in an exem-

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Ernst Niebur models his new Henri Lloyd boots, flanked by the old rubber ones, aboard his Columbia 32.



Acadia Sails in Maine saved the day for a family in the middle of three-week cruise who needed a fast fix to a failed mainsail.

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play way but went way beyond the call of duty to make sure that I was completely satisfied—and then some!

Ernst Niebur
Tavernier, Columbia 32
Baltimore, Md.

