

KEVO'S BOATING TIPS & MORE

BY
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Correction

Last month's column went to press with an error regarding "DAY BEACONS OR DAY MARKS." The correct explanation follows: A red triangle indicates the right or starboard side of the channel when returning from seaward. A green square indicates the left or port side of the channel when returning from seaward.

Marine Satellite TV

One of the hottest marine electronics systems on the market today is the in-motion satellite TV antenna. These little wonders have dishes similar to your home satellite system, but move like a gyroscope to keep a lock on the incoming signal even when underway. To find out more about these systems, I sat down with our resident marine electronics guru, Mr. Ian Wall.

Ian is president and founder of Star Marine Electronics Inc. He is also president of the Northern California Marine Association (NCMA). At age 16, Ian started working at the same company his father worked for back in New Jersey. They produced and sold commercial marine electronics and



Ian Wall, president and founder of Star Marine Electronics, Inc.

communication systems for large oceangoing vessels like tankers, tugs and freighters. In the early 1980s, Ian accepted a promotion/transfer to one of the company's fledgling operations in the Bay Area. It was here that he was exposed to, and recognized, the enormous potential marine electronics held for recreational vessels. Unfortunately, his company did not share his vision. In 1983 he said "adios" and started Star Marine Electronics.

Star Marine Electronics is located at 2099 Grand St., Suite 9-B, Alameda, CA (Grand Marina). You can reach them at 510/769-7827 or info@starmarineelectronics.com or sales@starmarineelectronics.com. For links to satellite TV manufacturers, go to www.starmarineelectronics.com and click on satellite TV.

Systems Continuously Improved

In-motion satellite TV systems for recreational vessels have been around since the late '70s, but became more prominent as home satellite TV services became more commonplace. One problem was the size of the dish antennae. They were huge and therefore impracticable for most recreational vessels. They were also very expensive. Because of the technology of the time, these systems took a long time to acquire the correct satellite signal. Often viewers would lose the signal and then have trouble getting it back, resulting in frustration, I'm sure.

Since being introduced to the recreational market, these systems have improved dramatically. Most notably, the size of the dish has steadily decreased

making them more practical for smaller vessels. Also, with increased refinement using GPS technology, the acquisition time has decreased and they now retain the signal very well, even in (medium) rough seas. Concurrently, the satellites themselves have been replaced and services improved.

Shopping for the Right Model

Star Marine Electronics carries the three biggest satellite TV antennae brands: Sea Tel, KVH and King-Dome. Both Sea Tel and KVH evolved from the commercial maritime satellite TV market. King-Dome has evolved from the recreational vehicle (RV) market. Sea Tel and KVH are by far the biggest players in this market. King-Dome systems are less expensive, but still offer good quality for the money.

When looking for a marine satellite TV system, one should first focus on the size of the antennae and where it will be mounted. Each brand offers different models. The primary difference between models is the size of the dish and the range of reception. Since the satellites are in a geosyncratic orbit around the earth they transmit to specific areas. There are no (commercial) TV satellites stationed above the middle of the Pacific Ocean, so the farther you go offshore, the bigger, more powerful system your vessel will require. If, like me, you boat in the Bay Area, the smallest, entry-level model will suffice in terms of reception.

It should be noted that these antenna systems typically are not sold with the TV service itself. If you already have satellite TV at home, you can use your existing account to start service on your vessel and the cost will be included in your home bill. The cost for adding additional service for your vessel is a nominal \$4.99.

Installation Tips

When installing these systems, the primary focus is on esthetics. Getting the dome that looks the best and in some cases has the lowest profile is important to buyers. In fact, it is fairly common for owners of larger yachts to have a "dummy" dome installed on the other side of the radar arch in order to achieve the desired look for the vessel. (The dummy dome will set you back around \$400.) Sometimes these second domes are actually satellite telephone antennas.



King Dome, KVH and Sea Tel satellite TV antennas.

If the vessel has radar, you don't want to mount the TV dome at the same level. One needs to be higher. It is best to have the TV dome higher than the radar. If it is installed with the radar antennae higher, you could get a "blind spot" in reception for your new satellite TV. (Not good.)

One of the reasons satellite TV systems have become so popular has to do with the new flat

screen TV technology available today. As most experienced mariners know, it's all about real estate. In other words, boats have a limited amount of space. The smaller the space required, the more applicable the technology is to boating. Can you imagine a big 50-inch rear projection TV in the salon of your vessel? You'd be lucky to even get it through the door let alone have anyplace to put it. LCD flat screen TVs tend to hold up better in marine environments than plasma TVs.

Price Range for Satellite TV

You can expect to pay between \$3,000 and \$9,000 for a satellite TV system (installed), depending on the system you choose. Installations typically run between \$1,000 and \$2,000. Adding monitors is no problem; however, multiple receivers will be needed to view different programs on separate monitors. Often an RF (radio frequency) remote control is added to these systems so if you only have one receiver and it is in the salon, you can go to your master stateroom and use the remote to change channels.

In the (hopefully near) future, Internet access will be available through your satellite TV system, both at home and on your vessel. Teleconferencing is also on the horizon. I can just see it now... you're out on your yacht "doing business" when the boss calls you on your TV. You yell to your wife to get the "office backdrop" in place before accepting the call. "No worries Boss, everything is under control." HA!

At Pacific Powerboating, one of the things I've observed while instructing inexperienced skippers how to operate their new vessels is that the guys are really focused on how to use the electronics while the gals are not (generally). However, mention satellite TV and you get instant attention from the gals (and kids). This is the primary reason I chose marine satellite TV as my first marine electronics subject. Having said that, I'd like to hear from you. Tell me what other marine electronics you would like me to cover in future columns.

As always, feedback is appreciated. You can reach me at kevo@yachtsmanmagazine.com or 925/890-8428.

Be safe and happy boating. ⚓