

KEVO'S BOATING TIPS & MORE

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Marine Audio Systems

OK... I admit it: I am probably the WORST person on the planet to be writing an article on marine audio systems and how to choose one. Don't get me wrong, our vessel, *Her Way*, has a really cool audio system, complete with satellite radio and iPod® connections. But do I know how to use it? (Barely!) I don't even know what brand it is!

Obviously, I'm going to need some expert advice to get my story straight. For this I turned to Mr. Keith Ellison, president of Loud Liquid. Keith's been selling and installing marine stereos for close to 10 years. Keith and his team have installed hundreds of marine stereo systems. One of the first things he told me is to get an expert opinion on the vessel and the compatibility with the stereo before purchasing. This seems like sound advice (excuse the pun).

There are many differences between auto stereos and those manufactured for marine use. Probably the most important difference is that the circuit boards on marine application sound systems are coated with a silicon compound to prevent moisture from harming delicate components. This is not the case with auto applications.

Next, the speakers: Marine stereo speakers seem to have some pros and cons. The pros are that they are waterproof, very durable, and have UV protection built into the speaker grills. A con is that waterproofing methods limit heat dissipation. No water in also means no air out, causing inadequate cooling and improper pole venting, which can limit power handling.

A good marine stereo system should be just like any other purchase you make. It should be well planned, dependable and perform in all situations you put it in. Communication with the installer is critical. Every aspect of your installation should be discussed, from user control to situations it is going to be used in. If the vessel has a cabin, would the customer like to listen to the stereo just down below or just in the cockpit or both? If the vessel has a tower, the volume from some speaker systems can be overwhelming to passengers in the rear of the vessel. If the customer wants a quality system but is on a budget, can the salesperson/installer provide adequate solutions and options? All of these issues should be discussed and the salesperson/installer should be well versed in marine applications to completely understand and advise.

Marine audio systems tend to be pricier than auto stereos. Marine applications are very specific when it comes to part placement and available space. Every part needs to be located away from possible water contamination (whether the part is marine grade or not).

When it comes to choosing an installer for your marine stereo system, trust and communication are paramount. A good installer/salesperson should be a

good listener and ask (good) questions prior to suggesting service, not just try to sell a hastily thrown together package to rid them of old stock. The folks at Loud Liquid want to see every customer with their boat prior to suggesting solutions. Experience with installing marine stereo systems is crucial to getting the system that works best for your needs and will keep working for many years of musical enjoyment.

The time required to install marine stereo systems depends on the depth of installation and the quality of the work. Only a detailed understanding of the boat and system in conjunction can allow an installer to provide an accurate time estimate. Most basic upgrades can be installed in about one day. However, an intricate system could take weeks to install properly.

What About Satellite Radio and iPod?

Boating sometimes takes you to isolated locations where reception from even the best marine stereo system can be sketchy. Adding a satellite tuner such as XM® or Sirius® can greatly improve station reception and availability in almost all areas. Almost every manufacturer makes an add-on receiver and some even make "marine antennas." While marine-style antennas are not fully necessary if the installation is done correctly, most boaters prefer the peace of mind of knowing their satellite system will get the best possible reception and insist on marine-grade antennas.

As technology advances and becomes more portable it becomes more and more visible in all applications. No one likes to hear his or her CD skipping in rough water. Also, stopping and looking for more CDs or changing the magazine in a changer can become a constant chore and could possibly be a serious distraction for the skipper of the vessel. I stress to my clients at Pacific Powerboating that it is crucial for the skipper to keep his or her eyes on the "road" at all times while underway, especially in the narrow and congested waterways of the Delta.

Enter the iPod! This little wonder is becoming increasingly popular in the boating world due to its ability to play hours of music without skipping. The iPod can be utilized almost anywhere. With almost every stereo manufacturer making adaptors or "plug and play" head units with track and title display capability, iPod usage is greatly increasing and is definitely an advantage for boaters looking for dependable audio equipment.

Currently, Loud Liquid Audio sells and installs audio systems on trailered boats. They do the installation at their facility in Sacramento. They don't have a mobile installation capability for large yachts berthed in marinas; however, Keith has indicated that he may expand his business in this area in the future. Keith can be reached at 916/851-0817 if you have any questions regarding marine audio systems. (Don't ask me!)

Kevo's Tip:

Audio systems for marine use are getting more and more sophisticated and complicated. Choosing the right system and having it installed properly should take priority over other issues for boaters interested in purchasing such systems. Know the system seller and installer. Ask good questions. Be sure you have communicated effectively with the company to ensure they do the job the way you want it done. Ask for references. By following Keith's good advice, you should have many years of musical enjoyment from your new marine audio system.

As always, feedback is appreciated. I can be reached at 925/890-8428 or kevo@yachtsmanmagazine.com. Be safe & happy boating! ⚓