



THE LIGHT

September 2009



Navigational Options

Brian Mikiten

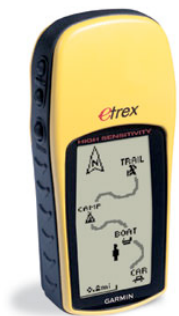
I should start this month's article with an admission of guilt. I'm an electronics nut. It is a problem that no 12-step program can cure and as a result, I must live with this malady for my entire life. Mind you, I'm not complaining. Instead, I mention it because this month, I'm answering the question posed by some members about the SPOT system I commented on in a prior issue. We are covering an array of options for navigation from dividers to chart plotters and I think you'll see my bias but at least you'll know why.

The entire concept of navigation is one that has fascinated those on the high seas for a millennium. From times before Captain Cook mapped the better part of the world, men would venture out on boats as small as canoes using only the sun and stars for navigation. In the early days especially before accurate time pieces came to ships, most navigation was lacking in accuracy and in most cases, detail. Cook's voyages produced some of the very first charts that could be relied upon for passages and it wasn't until the mid 1900's or even later that these charts were updated using modern instruments.

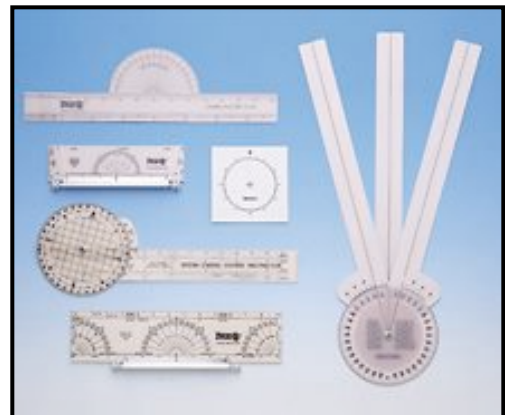
It is important to evaluate the use of charts in your daily boating life before any decisions or better yet, lively debates can be had about their role in your navigational needs. I have found that a few factors drive most navigational decisions:

- 1) Your location. Are you at sea or at home at the kitchen table planning a route? I find that using charts when I'm on the boat is difficult due to lighting, boat movement and other factors. On the contrary, sitting at home planning a trip is a real pleasure with a chart in front of me instead of GPS software. I like to touch the charts and feel the route. Either way, I keep both with me while sailing. I do carry a backup GPS but I do not carry a backup set of charts.
- 2) The cruising area. If your goal is to take the boat out for a short jaunt in your usual cruising areas, the likely hood of needing a chart is certainly reduced but most boaters will carry a GPS. Failing to do so would certainly be a mistake as we all know that conditions and situations change.
- 3) Quality of data - the fact is, charts are not updated often enough to take into account missing buoys, wrecks and other navigational changes. The Coast Guard publishes regular Notifications to Mariners that include changes that should be used to update charts but anyone who receives them knows that using them can be a long and laborious task.
- 4) Do others need to know your location? Most people don't consider this as part of the discussion but both AIS and SPOT type systems allow others to see your current position.

The ability to manually plot a course seems to be a rare talent these days. Mariners may have a set of dividers or other basic tools but few can take sun angles and even if they were taught the skills at some point, lack of use and the ability to grab a GPS often dulls these skills to the point where they are not reliable. Even the common practice of keeping a ship's log and updating a course seems to be losing importance in our modern world.



It is likely that everyone reading this has a form of GPS - the very common Global Positioning System that identifies your location based on a triangulation of signals by your receiver. This method is accurate to 10-20 meters and your position is plotted on a screen on top of map provided by the GPS manufacturer. Those of you who have one, have probably driven down the beach North of the island only to find that the GPS shows you 5-10 meters off shore in the water. While this is an interesting and humorous occurrence, it highlights the issue for boaters - especially if you are trying to navigate in tight channels. Relative position to your prior path can be relied upon but not your relative position to the chart.



that then reports the data to a personalized and company web site. Below is an example screen capture from a recent trip the BVI that was available to family and friends. The cost is very low at \$149 for the unit and another \$99 per year for a subscription which gives you and others access to the web site and most importantly, the ability to call for help using a single button on the unit. I have become dependent on my SPOT each time I go sailing as it provides feedback to those on shore about my location and progress. I've used during both racing and cruising for over a year with flawless results. Keep in mind it doesn't provide GPS coordinates to the user so it isn't a navigational aide per se.

AIS (Automatic Identification System) units go one step further and shouldn't be confused with navigation aids as they are instead classified as collision-avoidance systems. Required on all commercial vessels over 300 Tons and transmitting on VHF channels, at 161.975 MHz 162.025 MHz, the system is line of sight and has a typical range of 20 nautical miles depending on antenna height. These world-wide radio based systems are available as either receivers or transponders and some include VHF radios as part of the package. Prices are coming down to the point that they are a viable option on recreational watercraft.



The receivers will pick up the transponders located on larger vessels and display their name, course, speed and other critical data. If you have a transponder on your boat, others will get the same information helping everyone to avoid collisions. A bonus to the system is the ability to report to a central repository on-line at sites such as <http://www.marinetraffic.com/ais/> where ships around the world can be located and tracked.

The bottom line (for me) is that navigation has changed over the last twenty years since I took my first Coast Guard course and as a result, I have to change my expectations and skills. Safety at sea would demand that any boater look at all the available options and balance cost and needs before making a decision. Regular upgrades of each system over time will help maintain a budget and the newest toys. Fortunately, a decent set of charting tools will last a lifetime. I wish we could say that about our technology.

2009 Race and Cruise Schedule

- September 19, Fall Series Gulf Race
- September 20, Fall Series Bay Race
- October 17, Fall Series Gulf Race
- October 18, Fall Series Bay Race
- November 21, Fall Series Gulf Race
- November 22, Fall Series Bay Race

Remember, you don't have to own a racing boat to race. Everyone is welcome under our handicapping rules where the best sailed boat and not the fastest wins.

For changes or comments email bmikiten@idworld.net

Club Notes and News

We've added this space to ensure that club members are aware of recent Board and Club activities. Please feel free to add your comments here via email.

New Burgees - The New Burgees are in and priced at a very low \$25 each. Please feel free to contact Jim Godfrey for any additional purchasing information.

New Captain's Chairs for the clubhouse will be ordered by Peggy Godfrey in the fall. If you have interest in representing your boat in the club house, please let her know.

Catering of future Club Events - Look for catered events in our near future. Peggy is working on arranging the details and updates will be posted to the web site and announced in future issues of "The Light"

Election of Officers

The time for the yearly election of Officers for the LMYC board of Flag Officers as outlined in the by-laws is upon us. A nominating committee will be named and will have the responsibility of formulating a listing of nominees for positions on the board of Flag Officers from the general membership. Each position, even if the officer currently holding an elected position cares to run for re-election, will be considered in the nominations and the result of those nominations will be presented to the Commodore at the October 09 Board meeting. From there the nominations will be placed in an election slate for consideration and election by the members at the November 09 social. Positions are coming open for various reasons, and the LMYC membership is encouraged to make it known if you are interested in being placed in the nomination process and consideration for any position. Please contact Bill Maples, Vice Commodore at 979 218 4850. so that your name can be placed in consideration with the nomination committee.

FLYING THE U.S. ENSIGN

As most of you know, the club house has a new flagpole with a proper gaff and signal yards – just like the big time Yacht Clubs. It looks great but unfortunately it has caused some controversy within the club and our neighbors in the area. The controversy surrounds the proper place to fly the U.S. Ensign and the club burgee.

Chapman's *Piloting, Seamanship and Small Boat Handling* has devoted a whole chapter to Flag Etiquette. Chapman is an excellent reference for all things yachting. There are some excellent illustrations of the proper location to fly flags in virtually every edition. This information came from the 64th edition of this fine old reference.

At a yacht club the flagpole or mast is considered to represent the mast of a vessel, and the peak of the gaff, if one is used, is the place of honor from which the U.S. ensign is always flown, just as it would be on a gaff-rigged boat. The location of the gaff on the pole is opposite the direction to the water – as if it were on a ship standing out to sea.

There has been some confusion because proper flag etiquette requires no other flag to be flown above the U.S. ensign, and obviously another flag, such as the yacht club burgee at the masthead, will be higher than the U.S. flag when the latter is at the gaff. This is entirely proper because “above,” in flag etiquette, means “directly on top of” or “above on the same halyard.”

A flag is flown at half-mast (or half-staff) in respect for a deceased person. Although there are no laws governing the half-masting of flags on private vessels, or at private homes and clubs, most citizens follow the flag display customs used on U.S. government buildings and ships. Only the President or the governor of a state, territory, or possession can direct that the U.S. ensign be flown at half-mast.

The flag is flown from 0800 to sunset. It is commonly believed that the U.S. ensign must be lighted if flown after sunset. This requirement no longer exists in the U.S. Flag Code; lighting the flag after sunset is optional.

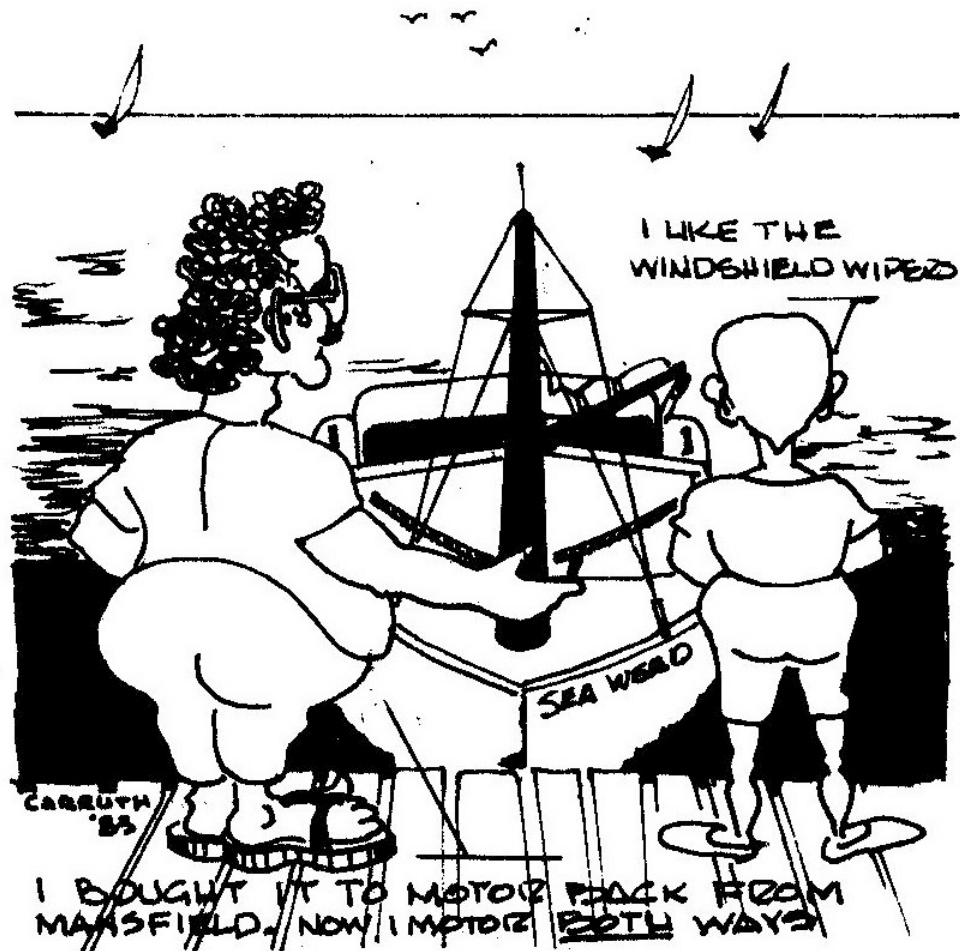
The proper place for a yacht club burgee is at the masthead if a gaff is present on the flagpole. The starboard yardarm is used for officer's flag, usually the senior officer present or a foreign ensign or other yacht club burgee if other dignitaries are aboard. The port yardarm is used for either yacht club officer's flags or general signal flags as appropriate.

On a private vessel, the U.S. ensign is flown from a flag staff at the stern or optionally, for a sailing vessel underway, at the peak of the gaff if so rigged or 2/3 up the leech of the mainsail or equivalent position along the backstay.

The proper place for the club burgee on a power boat is on a bow staff. On a sailboat the proper place is at the masthead but most vessels choose to fly the burgee incorrectly from the starboard spreader.

Jim Godfrey

A Cartoon by Tommy Carruth



Jim Caldwell was an avid sailor. However, in a weak moment he bought a small motorsailer, Sea Week. he did everything with it. He towed people that were aground and he even towed a shrimp net through the channels in the "fingers". Its best use though was coming home dow the "ditch" against the wind

Thanks to Bill Maples and Jim Godfrey for their contributions

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