

BY JEFF COTE, PACIFIC YACHT SYSTEMS

# ELECTRONICS ROUNDUP 2012

**With more intuitive and user-friendly electronics making the technical aspects of boating easier, you can spend more time enjoying the trip—it's a great time to be a boater**



**T**HIS YEAR, THERE'S been a lot of focus on innovations that make devices easier to use. Advancements in user interfaces, like smart menus and touch screens, give more intuitive options for controlling chart plotters, multifunctional displays, and other devices.

For example, Raymarine's new LightHouse interface has shortcuts for frequently used menu options, and saves customized navigation pages for quick recall. Similarly, Simrad's NSS software takes advantage of the touch-screen interface with very intuitive controls. These developments mean less time is required to change the settings—a big plus when you're in a busy channel and can't take your eyes off the water for long. As well, a lot of devices such as BOATraNet and the Fusion 700 series now integrate non-essential peripherals, such as music, internet connections or video into chart plotters and navigation networks. Music and entertainment systems are now eas-

ier to use and more convenient to access from the helm.

We've also seen competition ramp up, as manufacturers are pushed to release cool new features to a market that demands good value with the same user friendliness and high-tech features as the latest smartphones. This competition is

## SMART MENUS AND TOUCH SCREENS GIVE BOATERS MORE INTUITIVE OPTIONS

leading to innovative leaps and bounds, both from big and small players. Some big players have consolidated to leverage their larger R&D budgets, such as FLIR's purchase of Raymarine. Many new products have been released from the Navico brands (Lowrance, Simrad, B&G), and from Raymarine.

On the other hand, small players are reducing development costs by working with app platforms. Apps allow for

affordable products that still deliver good value—weather, charting, data and screen repeating apps. Navionics charts are also proliferating.

Adding internet and cellular communications electronics has been another big trend this year. Many tools are available to let you connect to other boats and to people on the shore. Devices such as the TELUS Smart Hub, or features such as the "Personal Hotspot" on the iPhone, turn a cellular signal into a Wi-Fi connection. This simplifies connecting many devices to the internet in semi-remote locations, and is becoming very popular. When combined with cell boosters to give you greater range, cell connections on board are increasingly common. For safety and social reasons, many boaters are connecting themselves to the internet and a cell signal.

More impressive features and devices are being released at every boat show, simpler human-conscious device control is helping make boating truly accessible, and the ability to stay in touch while you're out on the water means you can spend more time enjoying the trip. It's a great time to be a boater. ▶

**B&G Triton  
Instrument Display**

The B&G Triton navigation instrument allows enhanced readability with its 170° viewing angle on a sunlight viewable screen. The full colour display for true and apparent wind is intuitive and a pleasure to look at, and the trip log pages would come in handy. It also includes the screens you would expect such as speed, depth, heading and others. The device has a typical power demand that is below 100 mA, making it great for energy-conscious sailors. This makes it a worthy competitor to the Raymarine i70. The only possible downside is that integration to other products outside of the Navico family via a NMEA 2000 network remains unknown.



**Digital Yacht BOATraNET  
Wireless Navigation Server**

BOATraNET is a wireless navigation and data server. It allows your boat's existing navigation data to be viewed on mobile devices such as the iPhone, iPad, Android tablets, Macs, and PCs via a simple wireless hotspot, no app required. This is a great way to share real-time navigation data, files and media with your family and friends anywhere on the boat.

Through an NMEA 0183 (or NMEA 2000 with an optional gateway) connection, BOATraNET collects navigation information and automatically creates animated instrument and navigational displays of your data, shown as web pages. You can then use a browser to display data like depth and charts, or control music and view documents and photos that you've put on the BOATraNET server. If you're underway and someone else is at the helm, you or your visitors can keep an eye on what the instruments are showing from inside the cabin. The BOATraNET also offers internet access on board through optional Wi Fi.

Another bonus to this device is that it comes with Navionics Silver charts and a line-out connection for music playback. The limitations are that not all devices will work with the BOATraNET since an HTML 5 compliant internet browser is required, and a multiplexer is needed to connect more than two NMEA 0183 networks.



**Furuno NAVPilot  
700 Series Autopilot**

Furuno has released an autopilot series with new user interface improvements and a sunlight viewable display. The NavPilot 700 includes two optional safety features—Safe Helm and Power Assist. The Safe Helm temporarily disables the NAVPilot steering control when manual operator helm changes are sensed, similar to the Garmin shadow drive. This innovation allows boaters to make course changes without disengaging the autopilot, a convenience that saves crucial time when making an emergency manoeuvre to avoid a deadhead or other hazard.

The other key feature, "Power Assist," incorporates the Safe Helm concept and significantly reduces steering effort, much like power steering on a car. Both Safe Helm and Power Assist require a special Furuno patented hydraulic pump.



## Fusion 700 Series Marine Entertainment System



At time of print, Fusion has announced the scheduled release of its new 700 series marine entertainment system. There are two options for the main unit. The MS-IP700 offers a built-in dock for an iPod, while the MS-AV700 plays DVDs, giving you two alternatives depending on your listening or watching preference. A wireless smartphone or tablet can control all the settings on the entertainment system by adding a Wi-Fi router and installing the free app from Fusion. The apps are available for iPhone, iPod touch, Android or PC wireless.

This gives you the ease and convenience of controlling volume and track selection from different areas on the boat,

among other settings. The 700 series comes with a VHF receiver that enables you to listen to VHF radio through your sound system's speakers, keeping you safe with up-to-date information from the coast guard and letting you hear conversations from other boats. To achieve an even better sound, the MS-IP700 and MS-AV700 allow for independent control of balance, subwoofer, and volume in four separate listening zones.

Notwithstanding these advances, the impact of having entertainment data on an NMEA 2000 bus remains uncertain. Hopefully NMEA 2000 certification is part of Fusion's schedule before launch.

## Garmin GDL 40 Weather Receiver



Garmin has come out with the first cellular marine weather receiver. The GDL 40 can show weather radar data directly on a compatible NMEA 2000 Garmin chart plotter. While smartphones and cellular tablets can also access weather information via the cell network, the GDL 40 surpasses the image displayed on these devices because it can be integrated with the boat's chart plotter,

which tends to have a larger screen that is also sunlight-readable, and you can see the weather map overlaid on your chart. The GDL 40 provides real-time weather radar where there is good cell coverage, especially along the coast. While the GDL 40's pay-as-you-go option allows you the convenience of acquiring vital weather data when you need it, the product becomes costly if activated daily. ▶



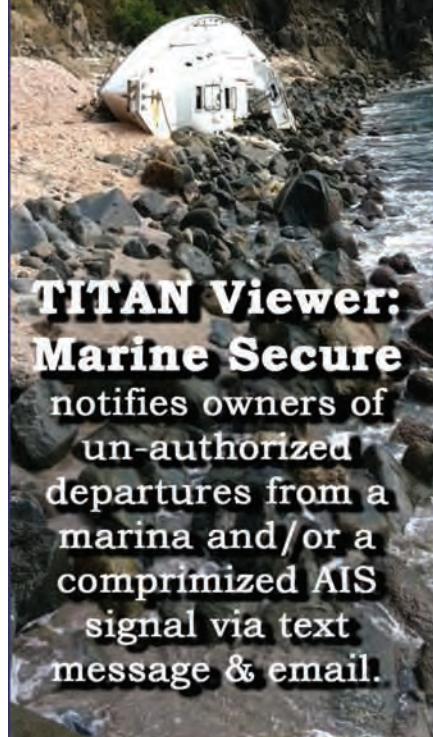
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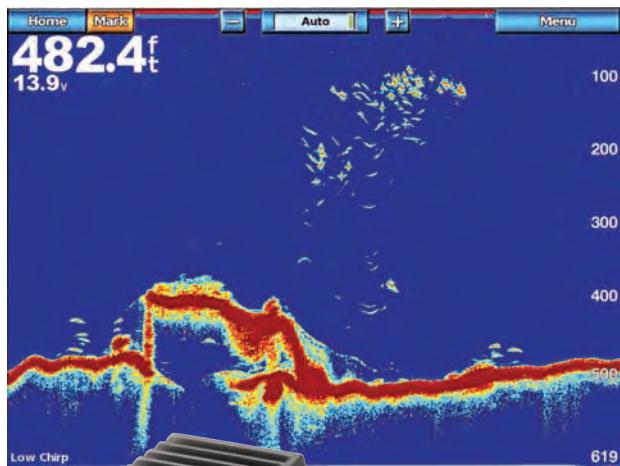
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### Garmin GSD 26 Digital Sonar

The latest fishfinder from Garmin takes sport fishing to a whole new level. The GSD 26 is a high-resolution digital sonar unit that allows you to see fish and other objects in both shallow and deep waters at the same time, with near photographic detail. It scans depths of up to 10,000 feet, automatically adjusts when moving to deeper or shallower water, and offers better target separation and resolution than previous fishfinder technology.

To do this, the GSD 26 takes advantage of advanced CHIRP technology or what Garmin calls digital Spread Spectrum technology, which creates the level of detail we see in the sonar images. Advanced sport fishers can disable CHIRP and dial into specific frequencies to target certain species of sport fish, or when fish appear on the display, mark GPS waypoints and go back to that location later.

With this high-end fishfinder, however, comes a high price point, and to benefit from CHIRP you need a high-end transducer and Garmin multifunction display, making it less accessible for the recreational boater. We discussed CHIRP sounders in more detail in the January issue of *Pacific Yachting*.



### ComNav Vector G1 GPS Compass

The ComNav Vector G1 is a GPS compass. This new sensor calculates compass course information from GPS satellite connections, as well as delivering standard GPS information such as speed and position. The accuracy and stability of the heading data is impressive, generally delivering better performance than the previous best-in-class solution of a solid-state rate gyro coupled to a fluxgate compass. This means that route tracking, radar overlays, and autopilot performance is improved. The Vector G1 also includes pitch and roll sensors, which allow your autopilot to compensate for motion in heavy seas, and some fishfinders and sonar units can use the data to compensate for the motion of the boat in their images. All the information the Vector G1 collects is conveniently available via either NMEA 0183 or NMEA 2000 connections. Despite the noteworthy capabilities of this sensor, mounting may be difficult, as the compass needs a good view of the sky. If it is mounted on a pole or mast, there are reports that it can vibrate too much to gather useful data.



### Geonav G10 and G12 Auto-routing Feature

The 10.4 and 12.1-inch multifunctional displays from Geonav have always offered a rich user interface, but now they have an exciting new auto-routing feature. This feature calculates the fastest and safest course to get from where you are to a waypoint and will even set waypoints for a connected autopilot to follow. Auto-routing can be done on either C-MAP or Navionics vector charts. Geonav says they will be including this autorouting software enhancement on new production runs and will make it available as a software upgrade for existing devices. As compared to other MFDs, the G10 and G12 include a built-in 2kW sonar, and their very narrow profiles make mounting particularly convenient in tight spaces. Apart from these great features, the Geonav MFDs are not networkable to other MFDs so any connected devices such as radar and sonar transducers cannot share their data with other displays.

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**KVH V3 TracPhone  
Satellite Communication**

The TracPhone V3 offers an incredibly compact solution for staying in touch with your family and friends on shore. This maritime VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) antenna is only 14.5 inches (37 centimetres) in diameter, which is great for small boats and gives you internet and a VoIP phone connection in remote locations all around the world. If you've been holding off on a satellite internet system because of the dome size, the wait is over. As well, the V3's airtime rates for broadband internet and voice calls are much more affordable than Immarsat's. With a download speed of up to 2 Mbps, the connection is comparable to an economy cable or DSL internet connection, and fast enough to watch online videos. Despite competitive usage prices, some boaters may find the initial purchase price high.



**Lowrance Broadband  
4G Radar**

The Lowrance Broadband 4G Radar is an improved radar technology that offers a 50 percent improvement in range, reduced power consumption, and better horizontal resolution than its BR24 and 3G predecessors, making even small objects like buoys detectable. While the benefit of traditional radar is a longer range, the 4G achieves better target resolution while still providing long range. This dome radar unfortunately excludes the new dual range feature available on its sister product, the Simrad 4G radar. Dual range can show a side-by-side split screen image of both distant and close targets from a range of 200 feet to 36 miles on an MFD that supports it (and for now that is only Simrad NSE and NSO and B&G Zeus multifunction displays, although this is rumoured to be changing). The Lowrance Broadband 4G Radar is especially popular when used for a chart overlay (which is only possible when paired with a smart heading sensor). The level of detail makes it easy to match the radar image to the details on the chart, thereby identifying your boat's position and the location of potential hazards. Some boaters say this improvement completely justifies the 4G's higher cost.



### Maretron FFM100 Fuel Flow Monitoring System

The fuel flow system from Maretron has a flow sensor and an FFM100, and makes fuel information available on the NMEA 2000 network. This allows you to see the present fuel consumption rate of an engine on the screen of a compatible multifunction display. A popular use for fuel flow information is tracking it against speed. This lets you find the most fuel-efficient speed to travel at, helping reduce fuel costs. Relatively straightforward to install, the FFM100 boasts high accuracy of fuel flow information (98.25 to 99.75 percent), for one because it uses information from temperature sensors to compensate for the true temperature, and also because the Maretron system automatically detects reverse flow, a common cause of inaccurate flow information. Since this system compensates for uneven flow, you get accurate readings even without costly fuel flow smoothing components, such as flow straighteners and pulse dampers. While this system is particularly cost-effective for diesel engines, more affordable recreational flow systems exist for boats that run on gasoline. Also note that it does require Maretron brand fuel flow sensors.

### Navico Go Free Wireless Strategy

Navico's new Go Free wireless strategy is creating rumours all around the web at time of print. While it's not public knowledge what they have scheduled, the general consensus is that they are planning on releasing a device that will allow independent developers to build software for their MFDs. This will enable apps for the iPad and Android devices to be created by outsiders that view and control Navico MFDs, as well as access the navigation and boat systems data on the connected network such as depth, wind speed, and fuel level information. Even the radar, sounder, and video information is rumoured to become available for apps to use. While this is all in discussion, the uses for this kind of access to data are endless. It would have a huge impact on the abilities of apps to cater to boaters' imaginations, and give Navico's products a leg up on the competition. It's too early to say which MFDs might be compatible with this release, or what restrictions (if any) Navico will have on the data. ▶

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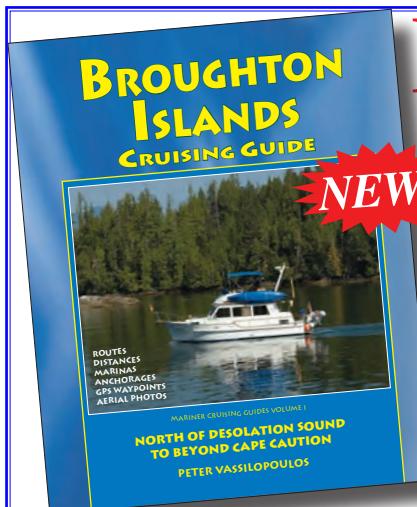
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### Raymarine e7 Multifunction Display

The Raymarine e7 includes built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technology in a multifunctional display. The built-in Wi-Fi enables features and saves you money, since to create a wireless network most devices require an external Wi-Fi router and often have limited options as to where to install it. Using this Wi-Fi network, the e7 can stream a copy of its display to an iPad, iPhone, or iPod Touch, creating a mobile data and chart centre anywhere on the boat. At this point you can't control the e7 from the app, only view a copy of the screen. But the e7 comes with Navionics charts and can sync with the Navionics plotter app on a mobile device, allowing you to plan routes when you're away from your boat and upload them automatically from an iPhone or iPad to the e7. Another wireless feature, the e7 supports a Bluetooth remote control that clips onto the steering wheel. Among other tasks, the remote lets you mark waypoints and acknowledge waypoint alarms without standing next to the e7. If you connect your iPhone to the e7 with Bluetooth, you can also control music on your iPhone directly on the e7 or with the remote. Although the e7 is a great product and showcases new wireless abilities, screen size may be an issue for some boaters.

### Raymarine i70 Instrument Display

The Raymarine i70 multifunction instrument has a great four-inch screen that is large, easy to read, LED-backlit, and viewable in sunlight. This compact, power-efficient device is the first instrument display to show AIS data, putting AIS traffic information in easy reach. Some of the other data that can be displayed by the i70 include wind direction, depth, speed, fuel level, and GPS navigation information such as position and course over ground. Out of the box, it connects to SeaTalk NG, but requires separate adaptors to connect to SeaTalk1 and NMEA 2000 networks. The i70 also lacks many NMEA 2000 PGNs from other vendors.



### Simrad NSS Series Chart Plotter



Simrad has improved upon its previous NSE series with three sizes of multifunction displays: the NSS7, NSS8, and NSS12. All three include a built-in GPS, and the seven and eight-inch sizes include a Broadband sounder (the transducer is sold separately). The main selling point of this series, however, is the combination of knob, button, and touch interface that Simrad calls "Touch Sensible." This interface lets you swipe between Pages, Tools, and Settings screens and adjust variables like radar range or sounder gain by simply sliding your finger on a long tap. The long tap is also used to open context menus. Long tapping is a selection mechanism. When you hold your finger down on the display, a visual indication appears that lets you know you've held your finger down long enough to activate your screen selection, eliminating a lot of frustration between user and device. The intuitive layout of the touch buttons puts the most-used option in a sub-menu directly under your finger when you open the sub-menu, for easy access the next time. Clearly a lot of thought and attention went into creating a user-friendly experience. Despite its friendly interface, the NSS does not have as clean a look as Garmin's 5 and 7000 series MFDs, nor a small space-saving size, which is a drawback especially prominent for the 12-inch device. Along with its bigger size, the NSS12 has a drastically higher price than the NSS8.



### Standard Horizon CP1010i Multifunction Display

Standard Horizon's CP700i and 1010i versions are the first MFDs that are also fully enabled internet devices. These integrated navigation, communication, and entertainment units have great connectivity, with support for NMEA 0183, NMEA 2000, Wi-Fi and Ethernet. This means they can display all the data from any kind of network, and you can do any number of activities from your helm, such as check your email, surf the web, navigate to your favourite waypoint, and play music through the built-in speakers on the MFD's front panel—speakers said to be especially powerful-sounding. It should be noted, however, that web browsing is only possible when the machine is not in navigation mode.



### Standard Horizon GX1700 VHF Radio

The recently released GX1700 from Standard Horizon is the first fixed mount VHF radio to include a built-in GPS. This innovation eliminates the need to wire a separate GPS unit to your radio to use DSC (Digital Selective Calling). Now VHF, GPS, and DSC are all interconnected, enhancing your safety on the water by making DSC calling simpler and more reliable. The GX1700 can also output the GPS information to a chart plotter so that your chart plotter knows and can plot your position. On most units, this also enables course-up chart plotting. In addition, the GX1700 shows your vessel's speed, course, and the distance to up to 100 manually entered waypoints on the display screen. One cautionary note is that this device should only be installed where VHF radio has good reception to a GPS satellite constellation—no metal obstructions should come between the GX1700 and a view of the sky.

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#### Tallon Mounts

Tallon has come out with a number of different appliances to mount your favourite devices like iPads, televisions, and smartphones on your boat. The company boasts secure mounts with adjustable arms that connect to a socket mounted anywhere on your vessel. The Ultimate iPad Mount from Tallon includes the Tallon Elite Socket with a built-in USB and 12V socket, giving you a power source and the ability to communicate from your iPad to other electronic devices on board such as a stereo. Unfortunately, iPads need a lot of power to charge, which standard USB ports like the one on a laptop or stereo can't deliver. To take advantage of USB charging, you'll need to connect a Tallon 12V to USB power adapter to the iPad, instead of other USB devices. Happily, the power available from a standard USB will help to maintain the iPad's battery even though it can't recharge it—an acceptable solution for those who would like to keep their iPad communicating with the rest of their USB devices. If an iPad is used as an integral part of a navigation system, it's important to keep it connected to power at all times.

#### Vesper WatchMate Vision AIS

The new WatchMate Vision from Vesper is an AIS class B transponder that is the first to include a touch-screen display and Wi-Fi functionality, allowing AIS interaction with any wireless smartphone, tablet or laptop. The device can be connected to a network via USB as well as NMEA 2000 and NMEA 0183, ensuring that AIS target data can be shared with most multifunction displays on a boat. WatchMate Vision also allows AIS clutter to be removed from the display, so that only the targets that have a current collision risk are shown. The interface is incredibly user-friendly and can be accurately controlled with ease, reportedly even with wet hands or when wearing gloves. However, the practicality of this device remains to be seen, as without any knobs or buttons, there is no assurance that this touchscreen-only display will provide easy operation in heavy seas.



## Wirie AP—Long Distance WiFi and Access Point

The Wirie AP offers a mid-range internet solution for your boat that detects and amplifies distant Wi-Fi hotspots, producing a local Wi-Fi network through which multiple devices can access the internet. If no hotspot is available, devices connected to the local Wi-Fi can still share files and information such as reports or music libraries, and all that is required is a power cable. This device is enclosed in an IP67 waterproof case, and the benefits of having one are simple. The Wirie AP makes it easy for both you and your family and friends to hook up your smartphones, tablets, and computers to a distance hotspot and connect to the internet. It is compatible with any Wi-Fi enabled device that has a web browser. One drawback is that it does not support a wired Ethernet connection, so devices that only have Ethernet, such as chart plotters, require a separate wireless card. ☺



**Pacific Yacht Systems**  
marine electronics & electrical

**Jeff Cote** is a systems design engineer and owner of Pacific Yacht Systems, a full service shop delivering marine electrical and navigation solutions for recreational boats. Visit their website and blog for more info and articles on marine electrical systems, projects and more. [www.pysystems.ca](http://www.pysystems.ca)

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