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Technology and Boating

Technology in today's world is everywhere. Our phones have more computing power than the spacecraft that carried our astronauts to the moon and safely home again. Our T.V.s can connect to the internet and access just about any information we seek and even suggest what we may want to watch in addition to just watching Network programming. Many new cars can now park themselves and brake in emergencies faster than humans are able to. So, it is no surprise that new technology has been seeping into our boats for over a decade now.

Emissions Regulations were the major driving factor for computer controlled cleaner burning engines, both gas and diesel. In the 1990's, computers began showing up in engines and by 2006, high pressure computer controlled fuel injection systems were required to meet those new marine emission standards. A side effect of the electronics on engines is they have become more powerful, smaller, lighter and more reliable. Around the same time pod-drive propulsion systems with joy-stick controls began making an appearance. First came Volvo I.P.S. and shortly after Cummins Zeus. The joystick control systems, which allow maneuvers such as moving a vessel completely sideways, began creeping into other propulsion systems. Water jets and now outboards enjoy this ease of operation without the operators having to think about what the engines and drive systems are doing. Simply point the joystick in the direction you wish to go.

Other new technologies are emerging as well such as G.P.S. systems connected to vessels electronic propulsion systems. At the touch of button, our vessels can hold their orientation and position. This means when waiting to enter a marina or a bridge to open or a position at the fuel dock, you no longer need to constantly work the gearshifts, throttles and wheel to remain in position. When single-handling a vessel, this system allows the operator to maintain a safe position while readying dock lines without fear of drifting into shallow water or other vessels. Electronics, just as their land-based counterparts, have jumped forward at an amazing rate. Navigation screens are now exclusively touch screen and do much more than just show you the chart, radar and sounder. They now offer control over stereo systems, complete engine monitoring, and control of other electronics such as the autopilot. Screen technology has advanced with higher resolutions and brighter screens that truly are sunlight viewable.

All of this new technology comes at a cost, not just in expense to purchase and maintain, but a cost in time. While computers have been touted as tools to simplify our lives, all of these new features and abilities require time to learn how to operate and then require time to monitor. They can also be overwhelming in the amount of information provided to us. Don't get me wrong, I love the new technology, but when yachting, sometimes I just like to sit back and enjoy the view and sea air. Do not get so wrapped up in all of the gizmos and gadgets that you forget to enjoy the experience.