

Original Comment:

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Ref Radar

We are looking at buying a Radar set for our B34 and have seen combined Radar and Chartplotters at the Boat Show, very nice but not sure that it is worth the expense. Never having used radar, we wondered what experience other owners have of Radar in particular and whether binnacle or chart table mounting works out best, is mast or stern pole mounting for the dome best.

Comments from your experience would be very welcome.

Paul Anthony (Bavaria 34 'Escapade')

Replies:

I have a combined colour raymarine radar/chartplotter below with monochrome repeater at the binnacle together with wind, autopilot and tridata instruments on the same data circuit.

My personal view is as follows:

1. If you have a single display it should be at the binnacle because this is where it you will use it by far the most (crucially for the helmsman using chart leading lines for pilotage and radar output in poor visibility). The only slight hesitation I have is that this means the chart chip cover is exposed to the elements and you would need to satisfy yourself on water resistance (which I think is OK but have no experience).
2. Mast mounting of the dome works fine on my boat.
3. I did the RYA one day radar course and now understand how to make good use of the radar. Before, it seemed a puzzling display with obscure controls. If you go for the raymarine system you could add radar later via the high speed bus and this involve the master radar display down below but selectable from the binnacle.
4. I only have experience of Raymarine products and know they tend to be quite expensive. I am, however, very impressed with my system and particularly the compatibility and the way the various transducers and computer chips interact with each other to provide derived information output.
5. Both Opal Marine and AW Marine at Gosport have been really helpful to me in specifying and getting the system perfect. I have come to realise how complex these systems are and the importance of knowledgeable advice.

Henry Moore, (Bavaria 42 'Joy')

Radar is well worth the money, not only for its use in limited vis situations (which is justification enough if you have ever crossed the channel in fog!) but also for pilotage. It gives very accurate distance measurements from objects (fixed as well as moving) and, when linked to your GPS, will show on the screen where your next waypoint is before you can see it visually. Another use is for spotting and tracking rain and squalls (not advertised but very useful - see my article in the latest Newsletter). I have a Raymarine SL72 (the cheapest they offer) and am very pleased with it.

Regarding mounting, the only advantage of a stern pole is that you can lower the mast without disconnecting the radar. The disadvantage is that you can't get it as high (although 12 feet above sea level is probably OK). My scanner is mast mounted.

I am not a fan of chartplotters - they are expensive (for colour and a decent sized screen) and the charts they use are 'imitations' of the real thing. A combined radar/chartplotter looks like a great idea but if it fails for any reason, it wipes out both of your main navigation aids. I would also be dubious about fitting one in the binnacle, although it would undoubtedly be useful to have it there; they are not fully ruggedised for external use in my opinion. I was very keen on the Yeoman Plotter on my last boat (which utilises paper charts) but it wouldn't fit on the new chart table so I have moved on to a PC (laptop) based system. If you like PCs you will love PC navigation. I use an old laptop with a 133MHz processor but it is plenty good enough and has completed over 1000 miles of mixed sailing without failure. These can be purchased for a few hundred pounds now - probably less than a good chartplotter and are, of course, useful for many other things, like storing your digital photos, writing a log/diary, doing your planning or playing Solitaire!. You can even hook it up to your mobile phone and keep up with your Email. I power it from a small (cheap) inverter. The software package I use is Mapttech Cruising Navigator mainly because it uses copies of Admiralty Charts which are superior to anything else (personal preference!).

The Mapttech charts are also cheaper than the Admiralty ARCS charts and just as good. With

a laptop you can prepare your route at home or in the cockpit and then upload it to the GPS when you are ready. I can then use the GPS, connected to the Autohelm 6000, to drive the boat from waypoint to waypoint, if required; I would not actually trust the PC to do this on-line. I do use the PC to continuously plot the position from the GPS, though, and it is tremendously re-assuring to see the little red boat on the screen, exactly where it should be. I think this is a great system and very versatile; others, of course, may think differently! Finally, I would add that Marine Electronics dealers do not always offer unbiased advice about PCs - they would rather sell you (and fit) an expensive chartplotter!

Roger Leaman (B380 'Playtime')

Our Bavaria 38 was fitted on Opal recommendation with Raytheon RL70 combined radar / chartplotter 3 yrs ago. I have found the system to be quite excellent. In particular, the repeater unit on the binnacle has proved to be a very worthwhile investment. Should you go this route, I would further suggest our instrument layout of repeater and autopilot on the binnacle plus wind and depth/speed instruments either side of the companionway. This allows everyone in cockpit to `be involved` as well as the helms(person).

You should also benefit from colour displays now available. I think the Raymarine (formerly Raytheon) Raychart 520 is the current model (if I have read their latest publication correctly). No doubt they would be very happy to advise at the Boat Show. Incidentally, I looked at their passage planning software at the stand but concluded it was somewhat expensive and possibly not as fully functional (yet) as they suggested. In fact I settled for a cheap and cheerful £65 Neptune PC based software. For what we need it works well enough, at least at home!

Good luck with the electronics,

Tony Box (Bavaria 38 'Quick Return')

The YM has reported on radars in the Jan. 2002 issue. Best budget buy JRC 1500, best value for money Raymarine SL72 and premium product Furuno 1712. Raytheon Parthfinder series allows you to use several scanners with a variety of displays any of which can double up as a chart plotter, which is a help for space. I know of a B34 that has fitted a waterproof Raytheon to the pedestal and found it a great advantage, avoiding trips to the cabin.

I have the cheap JRC 1000 and find it adequate for our needs.

Ron Elliott (B34 'Odyssey')

I fitted a JRC 1500 to my new 40 last year. This was after my previous boat had a JRC 1000 which worked very well for the price. As the comparisons said in Yachting Monthly the JRC1500 does give a clearer picture and a better range but just for collision avoidance I would spend the extra money. The JRC 1500 links well with my Garmin Satnav and my Raytheon Autopilot. I have used the Raytheon and it is better still but I do not want all the features that offers so my spend the extra £400. Be careful when ordering that you get the price for the right length cable. Some people sell 10m cables with the radars and they may not be long enough to get to the scanner.

One of the big costs is the fitting if you want some views ask as this can be from £nil to £900 depending on how you do it.

John Richards