



CURRENT THOUGHTS



The problem of where and how to install electronic equipment on traditional yachts sometimes rears its antennae in all too obvious ways. While attending sail trials on a large yacht recently restored, there were, as is usual, a number of loose ends to be tied. Plumbers, riggers, joiners and painters were busily applying the finishing touches to a superb project. During this exceptionally busy time in a thorough restoration, tradesmen may be required to work on their own initiative. Perhaps it was just unfortunate that an electronics engineer found himself in just such a position when faced with the decision on where to install the bright, shiny, white plastic sensor for the GPS. He had acres of beautifully varnished teak surfaces to choose from and eventually settled for dead centre of a large locker lid amidships, from where the sensor could, so far as the engineer was concerned,

pick up the best signal from an entirely unobstructed exposure to the orbiting satellites of the Global Positioning System. As you will have guessed, in an environment of cream-coloured sailcloth, natural laid teak decks, and gleaming brass reflected in a dozen coats of skilfully-applied varnish, this little oblong plastic bump stood out like a big splash of by-product from a seagull's digestion.

While there are some staunch traditionalists who consider Ohm's Law to be the work of the Devil and will not allow so much as a stray milliamp to flow upon their boats, the number of people wanting to install modern electronic navigational equipment on old boats is increasing. On the east coast and in the north-west, in particular, there are a few valiant sailors who prefer to navigate their smacks, bawleys and nobbies through the winding shallows using local knowledge and a swinging lead, but just about every cruising boat we look at these days, from big restoration to new build, has electronics on board.

Perhaps because of its portability, the hand-held GPS is becoming as common as a good steering compass, but permanent electronic equipment is also gaining a bracket-hold. Often, the electronic gear is cunningly mounted around the navigation station concealed behind folding locker doors, but not everything which buzzes and beeps can be hidden in this way. The mizzen masts of the vintage ketches and yawls at this month's La Nioulargue regatta in St Tropez will present a range of radar-scanners rivalling the CIA, but none will have spruce-coloured cases in place of the standard dazzling white. Why?

Unlike riggers, sailmakers, paint manufacturers and other major players in the marine industry, the electronics companies appear to think that traditional boats are peripheral business. Presumably as a consequence of perceiving that all their logs, depth-sounders, plotters, windspeed gauges, and radars are only being bought by people who sail around in ugly plastic boxes, the design of sensors, repeaters, scanner housings and other components is rarely in keeping with the classical environment.

'radar-scanners rivalling the CIA'



Robin Gates