

HOW DAMP IS YOUR HULL?

TRAMEX SKIPPER PLUS £298



One of the most useful tools in a yacht surveyor's armoury is an electronic moisture meter. The one I've been using the last six years or so is called a Tramex Skipper – a handheld device with a couple of conductive pads on the back which you press against the surface of a hull. Other than the preparatory removal of patches of antifouling, no damage is caused.

The meter works by creating a low frequency alternating electric field between its two pads and measuring the electrical impedance to that field. The less impedance there is, the more easily the current will flow – and the higher the moisture content is judged to be.

The Skipper is an unusually powerful instrument, capable of penetrating the material to a depth of about 30mm. This gives it great sensitivity, which in GRP terms means it will detect moisture deep in a laminate. But it also presents a problem, since it will even register moisture inside a hull – bilge water, condensation, perhaps damp carpet or cabin linings. Such rogue readings need to be investigated further by the surveyor so they can

be eliminated from the panic list.

Enter the Tramex Skipper Plus. It's almost identical to the original but has a couple of new features. Firstly, it turns itself off after two minutes of inactivity (a trifling matter, you might think, but not if you've had to buy as many PP3 type batteries as me). More importantly, it has a Surface Moisture setting (called Range 3) that reduces the instrument's power so it measures only surface moisture and won't divine all those sodden bits inside. Now if the meter leaps off the dial and the warning buzzer sounds, you switch to Range 3 to get a second opinion.

Help with osmosis

Quite apart from identifying absorption problems, moisture meters also play a central part in putting it right. What to do about osmosis has been discussed many times in PBO, but the basic prescription is to peel off the gel coat, wash the hull thoroughly to remove the dissolved compounds, allow the laminate to dry and then to reinstate the gel coat with solvent-free epoxy resins and extra glass reinforcement if necessary. A vital



part of this process is to monitor the drying. The Skipper Plus is ideal for this purpose.

And it can perform other important tasks. For instance, poorly bedded deck fittings often allow water into balsa cores: the Skipper Plus can track how far it has migrated. Timber and plywood becomes susceptible to mould and rot once the moisture content exceeds 20%: Range 1 will measure the moisture content of hardwoods and there are adjustment factors (based on Specific Gravity) for other densities. Dublin-based Tramex suggests

that every skipper should own an electronic Skipper Plus to monitor the hull. Well, at around £298 a pop (depending on exchange rates) there is perhaps a stronger case for groups of boat owners (friends, clubs and class associations perhaps?) banding together and buying one between them.

All in all, the Tramex Skipper Plus is a really useful tool that can help us keep our boats shipshape.

Andrew Simpson

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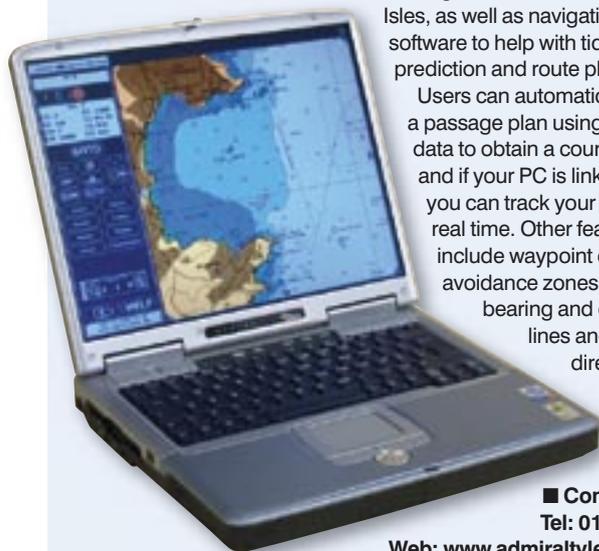
PC CHARTING

ADMIRALTY CHART PLOTTER £49.95

Last year the Admiralty launched an electronic chart plotter aimed at yachtsmen making the first leap from paper to PC. However, the application came down heavily on the side of safety with a 12-month expiry date on the charts.

With the enhanced version, the Admiralty has removed the expiry date and dropped the price. Each CD carries an average of 18 charts covering 12 areas around the British Isles, as well as navigational software to help with tidal height prediction and route planning.

Users can automatically correct a passage plan using the tidal data to obtain a course to steer, and if your PC is linked to GPS, you can track your vessel in real time. Other features include waypoint entry, avoidance zones, electronic bearing and distance lines and directional planning arrows.



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MAINTENANCE-FREE DECKING

AIKONA DECKING FROM £75 PER M²

To get the appearance of wooden decking without the hassle, Aikona has produced a hard-wearing vinyl alternative that can be used on deck or in the cabin sole.

Aikona comes either plain or with a caulking stripe, and has a grained appearance that can be left rough cut or sanded, depending on your choice of finish. The non-slip surface is available in a range of colours, and is sunlight and water-resistant. There's no need to varnish it (although for use indoors a light varnish would make it easier to clean) and it comes in a range of thicknesses. Prices start at £75 per square metre.

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