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TRIED & TESTED



Two decades of weather had taken its toll on the instruments

Stowe restored

When you start squinting at your instruments, it's time for either an eye test or an upgrade. Dick Durham rejuvenates his Stowe Dataline GX



UV rays cracked this screen cover

The depth, speed and wind displays on *Minstrel Boy*, my Contessa 32, had seen better days after 20-plus years of sun, salt and spray had taken their toll. And my masthead transducer, though spinning round day-in, day-out like some forgotten hamster on his wheel, was giving me a better reading on port tack than starboard.

Though many yachtsmen dismantle and refit their own instruments, I asked electronics engineer Richard Tinley to have a look at mine and make a prognosis.

It was not good, but at least Richard confirmed that I didn't require an optician.

Ultraviolet sunlight had crazed and split the plastic screen of the depth sounder's display case, that much was obvious, but the sun had also faded the function commands on the bezel and discoloured the fascia board inside. The wind and speed display cases were also murky, this time from an anti-mist coating used inside the screen. 'It's a desiccant, no longer used, which unfortunately degrades and ends up permanently misting the screen over,' said Richard.

Crewman Gareth Hobrow went aloft in the bosun's chair to bring down my masthead unit, which gives the wind speed and direction. Richard discovered the anemometer's spar had broken in the past and had been glued together by a previous owner.

He then checked the through-hull depth transducer, which was found to be in good condition:

'It just wants a light rub-down with wet-and-dry sandpaper to clean off the antifouling,' he said.

With the instrument displays and masthead unit removed to Richard's factory unit in Lymington, his investigations continued. He used solvent to clean the desiccant off the display boxes and replaced the crazed screen.

He found that the masthead unit's variable resistor was worn, causing the needle to jump erratically, by more than five degrees at a time in light airs. He suggested I dispense with this old 'mechanical system' and instead upgrade to the new microprocessor-operated transducer, which his company manufactures.

My new masthead unit – which uses a carbon fibre spar in place of

the old alloy one – was then calibrated in the factory. The chip measures the wind vane magnet for each degree and logs it, in effect creating its own compass deviation card, thus making it more accurate.

Minstrel Boy was fitted with cleaned and resealed display cases for speed and depth, plus a restored display over the chart table. But the wind display and masthead unit was upgraded. The results are impressive: the wind display has many more functions and is much more sensitive to wind shifts and fluctuations in strength.

The total cost was £790. By contrast, a new Simrad IS20 system comes out at £1,785, a Raymarine version at £1,834 and budget buy NASA at £500. None of these prices include installation costs. ▲



Above left: New covers. Above right: Richard calibrates the masthead unit



The revamp has given these reliable instruments a new lease of life

STOWE

Richard Tinley, who formerly worked at Greenham Marine and Brookes & Gatehouse, started his own company, Tinley Electronics, in 1998 and bought Stowe in 2007.

Stowe was founded in the 1980s by Alan Cozins, who started off in a shed in the back garden of his home in Rowlands Castle, Hampshire. In 1984, he produced the Navigator range of instruments. In 1987, the Micro

range was launched and in 1990, the Dataline range. In 1991, Stowe changed hands several times before Richard bought the company, well aware of the fact that over 120,000 yachts worldwide are fitted with Stowe instruments.

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