



## Some of my Favorite Cruising Gadgets

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If you are like us, finding an inexpensive but suitable replacement for costly, but necessary marine equipment is an exciting discovery. A number of them have been recommended to us by other cruisers. Others have been found by someone on our boat who spends much more time than me trolling the internet (my geek wife, Sherry). And finally many come from those practical and cost conscious New Zealanders and Australians that we are constantly meeting out here in SE Asia.

I particularly like the small battery-powered devices that the industrious Asians are constantly inventing for us. There are also some wonderful battery-powered tools based on strong and efficient 20v Lithium Ion batteries. Even rechargeable battery technology has come a long way in the past few years. Below find some of our favorites:

**Battery Powered Tools.** No longer is it necessary to spend 15 minutes digging out your tool of



choice, finding an outlet of the correct voltage and plug type, stringing a long enough extension cord through the boat, checking with your mate that you are not inconveniencing her, and then attach your corded electric gizmo, before going to work on that two minute project. Now we have 20 volt lithium ion battery operated multi tools. Our set consists of a handle with battery, a 3/8"

variable speed drill, a sabre saw, a 3.5" circular saw, a pad sander, a reciprocating saw, an oscillating tool, and an extra battery and charger. Each work piece just locks into the single handle and battery. Since the lithium batteries hold most of their charge for many months there is no need to plan ahead and charge a battery ahead of your work. I just rotate batteries when they expire. We use the Black and Decker set because it is relatively inexpensive and works fine for my light duty work. There are also many other heavier duty but more expensive sets. Every manufacturer of electric tools makes a set because they are so popular. Find them on the internet or major hardware stores at around \$60 for the basic drill, and \$30 for the attachments.

**Rechargeable Batteries.** Many years ago we used alkaline batteries for our flashlights and other battery powered devices. In the tropics they often leaked,



ruining our equipment. Now we know better and have none aboard. More recently we switched to rechargeables, first NiCad, and then early generation NiMH (nickel metal hydride) cells. They each had problems, such as a fairly short charged storage life, high failure rate, and memory and charging issues. About 5 years ago we discovered the modern generation of NiMH batteries with a long charged storage life. Best of all they don't leak. They are expensive, but for a cruiser living off the grid, they are worth the initial investment. So now almost all of our battery powered devices use either AA or AAA modern rechargeable NiMH batteries. Based on the internet research we did, the Eneloop NiMH brand was our choice. The top internet rated charger for them is the La Crosse Technology Model BC 1000. It has an individual digital display for each battery and gives lots of useful data during charging. It now only takes 3 minutes to do a 2 minute project and there are no more interference complaints.

**Wireless Windlass Remote.** Or 'wireless winch remote control' as they are sold on the internet. These were originally designed to control overhead winches in large warehouse buildings. They have a 50-60' range so you can operate your windlass from anywhere on most cruising boats without a cord. They are battery powered, and some are waterproof. The one we have is the [KLS Model 213](#). We bought ours on eBay, direct from China, search for "Waterproof Wireless Winch Remote Control Set". Unlike some of the marine versions, instead of paying nearly \$200, the cost is less than \$15.



**Bilge Alarm.** This little device will tell you when your home water heater is leaking. It also makes a dandy inexpensive bilge alarm. It has a plastic case, is battery operated, has a very loud alarm, and stick mounts on any smooth bulkhead. The sensor is at the end of an 18" waterproof cord. We have one in each bilge area of our cat and can easily hear it go off in the cockpit. Find these in hardware stores, Walmart and on the internet. Ours is the GE Water Leak Alarm Model 45411, costing less than \$10.



**Refrigerator Temperature Sensor.** Also known as the AccuRite Mod 00782 Wireless Weather Thermometer. The big advantage of owning a couple of these is being able to see such things as temperatures at various levels in a refrigeration box, the temperature in your engine room or the temperature in your boat, all from a remote location without wiring. They are battery operated and are available on the internet and from Walmart for less than \$20.



**Refrigerator Digital Thermostat/Temperature Controller.** At the advice of a friend, when one of our expensive marine digital refrigerator thermostats went on strike, we bought the internet equivalent. It has the same form factor as the original, gives the sensor temperature reading in large red numerals, has multiple settings and set points, and uses the same wiring arrangement as the marine version. Ours is Asian made by Shenzhen Willhi Electronics, model WH7016C (centigrade model). It is 12 volt, has a 5 amp control limit, and works well with our Danfoss BD50 refrigeration compressor. They are available on the internet for less than \$20.

**Remote Computer Screen and Wireless Mouse.** Instead of relying on an expensive chart plotter with often inaccurate charting in overseas third world areas, we use an inexpensive 5 year old computer with OpenCPN and Google Earth charts for close in navigation work. On Soggy Paws, we keep the computer safely below on the navigation table and have mounted a remote computer screen on a swing arm for cockpit and main cabin display of detailed navigation and Google Earth charting. We use this mainly in reasonable weather



conditions doing close-in reef navigation, so no need for a fancy expensive weatherproof display. The screen is an older 14" LCD monitor (\$50 used on eBay) that runs on 12 volts and has a plastic housing. What makes this work so well is the presentation mouse that lets us do, from 10 feet away on the helm, anything on the computer that a mouse can do. The presentation mouse we use is a Keyspan by Tripp Lite PR-US2 Presentation Remote, costing about \$50. You could probably find many more modern combinations on the internet.

I hope some of you will find these gadgets useful for your cruising adventures. Remember that the more of them you buy, the more you will save!

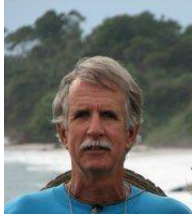
And don't forget that...

**He who has the most gadgets when he dies, wins.**

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*Author: Dave McCampbell is a retired US Naval Diving and Salvage officer with almost 50 years sailing and 8 sailboats worth of maintenance experience. He and wife Sherry, currently in the Philippines, recently spent 8 years crossing the Pacific. They have sold Soggy Paws, the CSY 44 monohull, and moved to the 'enlightened side', purchasing in 2015 Soggy Paws, the St Francis 44 catamaran.*

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