



Portable fuel bladders, handy life raft and enough crew for standing watch can make a dream trip a reality.



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BETTER BOATING

TO MEXICO FOR SAILS — ON YOUR BOAT?

How You Can Enjoy an Epic Journey Safely

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ince I left full-time sailing for a living many years ago, what I miss most is passage-making — the process of crossing vast expanses of open ocean. The excitement of the challenge and satisfaction of making landfall is extraordinary. Even just running out to the Atlantic canyons or down the West Coast into Mexico can offer an exciting adventure. And with the technology available today, combined with the proper boat, anyone can learn enough to start taking such epic journeys.

Here are just a few of the initial considerations you can explore to plan your first passage.

FUEL

Know your boat's fuel consumption at varying speeds. Determine how far you can go on a full tank at optimum cruise, including a 10 percent cushion. Once you have that information, you can decide where you can go.

What if your destination is farther than your fuel capacity? Consider carrying additional fuel in jerry cans or even better, a portable, collapsible fuel bladder. Find an example at atlinc.com and rusinflex.com/boat.html.

WEATHER

Most anglers aren't skilled meteorologists. If you plan a long-distance journey, the last thing you want is to run into horrific weather. Consider consulting a private meteorologist who specializes in trip routing. Such an expert can look at historic weather trends for the area you plan to transit and come up with a "best possible" time for you to undertake your journey. Type "meteorological ship routing" into your browser.

COMMUNICATION

Standard VHF has a range limited to line-of-sight



Fuel bladders let you extend your range, then fold up and stow away when you reach your destination.

Digi-Troll downriggers with compatible Humminbird fish finders. That way, for example, anglers targeting grouper along reefs can use the “bottom track” feature to keep lures a specific distance above changing bottom contours. Note that when using this feature, the angler should closely monitor the rod to pay out or reel up line as the downrigger adjusts to different depths.

The spools on electric downriggers turn via belt- or direct-drive mechanics. Belt-drive advantages include simplicity (fewer moving parts, easier service/maintenance) and less amp draw than a direct-drive system. “Although the difference is not significant and really doesn’t translate into extended battery life,” Maryanov says.

Maryanov recommends direct-drive as a durable, reliable system. “Belts tend to wear out or jump off the track and need to be replaced,” he says. “Cannon riggers employ a direct-drive system with solid-brass gears. The gear teeth are counteraligned to ensure a positive start and stop — no slipping.”

Ford points out that all Walker electric models rely on gear drive, which gives anglers the option to “power down” the weight. “Belt drives must be manually lowered by loosening the clutch knob,” he says. “Sometimes the lack of precise control lets the weight drop too quickly. Lures can helicopter and tangle on the cable, leaving fouled lines.”

WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN THERE?

Downrigger weights, also called cannonballs, typically range from 3 to 12 pounds. As you let out more cable to fish deeper, “blowback” forces the weight farther behind the boat and robs you of some depth.

“A rule of thumb says the deeper you fish, the heavier the weight,” Maryanov explains. “Heavier weights minimize blowback and keep your cable as vertical as possible. An 8- to 10-pound weight is sufficient for fishing down to 100 feet; below 100, a 12-pound ball is more effective; and in certain applications, like very deep reefs, a 15- to 20-pound weight

is used.”

Wouldn’t Spectra line’s thin diameter reduce blowback? “No,” says Maryanov. “There’s less blowback with stainless steel, because the cable’s weight creates a more vertical drop. Spectra also tends

Many salmon anglers use electric downriggers to stack rods (right). Weights (below) must be appropriate for the depths to be fished.



to dig in and bind on the spool. I recommend it only for fishing extreme depths, when increased line capacity becomes a factor.”

Another advantage to cable: Stainless steel conducts electrical signals, which allow features such as auto stop and positive-ion control to function.

Today’s downriggers do more than take baits to desired depths; they can send valuable info back to anglers above. The Walker Temp Pak (compatible only with Walker downriggers) relays bait-level readings to ensure your offerings stay at the thermocline or in your target species’ preferred temperature zone.

Who needs onboard satellite TV when you can get Walker Strike Vision? This underwater-camera system lets anglers monitor downrigger baits rather than simply watch rod tips.

KEEP AN ION THE BALL

The theory behind positive-ion control says a boat’s motor emits negative ions, which travel through the downrigger cable and repel fish. “PIC emits positive ions to counteract the negative field. In certain situations, such as salmon trolling in the Pacific Northwest, PIC has been shown to trigger strikes,” Maryanov says. “In some other conditions it doesn’t seem to trigger strikes. It’s somewhat of a voodoo science, but when nothing else is working, it can be an effective tool.”

Cannon Digi-Troll downriggers feature adjustable PIC that ranges from 0.2 to 1.2 volts, while Magnum models have a fixed PIC (0.6 volts). “All Walker Downriggers are manufactured to generate positive ions in a range known to attract fish,” Ford says. Anglers who use manual downriggers or electric models that don’t offer ion control can achieve this effect by attaching a Scotty Black Box device to their cables.

Downriggers, like other gear, should receive a freshwater rinse after a day of fishing. To ensure smooth functioning, Ford suggests checking the cable for frays and kinks, and then spraying it and the boom’s end pulley with a corrosion inhibitor. ☺

DOWN TIME

Major downrigger manufacturers include Big Jon (bigjon.com), Cannon (cannon-downriggers.com), Penn (pennreels.com), Scotty (scotty.com) and Walker (walkerdownriggers.com).

Find out what these companies offer by checking out the photo gallery at sportfishingmag.com/downriggers.

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