

# A Tale of Two Messages

Text and Photos By Steve D'Antonio  
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## From the Editor



Earlier this month I shared with subscribers my decision to resign my position as Technical Editor of PassageMaker Magazine, a publication I'd written for, and helped shape, for nearly fourteen years.

Therefore, the SDMC Marine Systems Excellence Blog has taken on a new and more critical role. Where it was an adjunct to my voice in other publications, it has now become my primary means of communicating with readers; it is now my unfettered, unrestrained voice. You'll notice that it includes more content, and it's accompanied by our new Facebook page, which includes regular technical tips and photo identification quizzes.

I look forward to growing into this role, and while I will continue to write for other select traditional publications that meet my standards, Professional Boat Builder and Cruising World among others, I now look forward to sharing my views and

thoughts with SDMC readers on a wide variety of topics, often with a slightly edgier style.

Toward that end, I received a host of e mails and phone calls from readers and colleagues, regarding my new editorial emphasis, many of which included suggestions for articles.

One note, from a long-time reader and client, Dick Stevenson, summed up the sentiments, and frustrations, of many others, *"I find the general boat owner nowadays woefully lacking in knowledge of what makes a boat seaworthy, what are good design and building techniques and the kinds of skills and experience a skipper must have under his/her belt before going on the water. There are many reasonable directions in which to point one's faulting finger, but, for me, the marine journalists are high on my list. They are often what stirs the interest and begins the education of the average boater, certainly at first, and I see them dropping the ball when it comes to challenging and questioning and making comparisons."*

Dick's experience is substantial, he and his wife Ginger have cruised their Valiant sloop around the Caribbean, Mediterranean and Northern Europe for several years.

I couldn't agree more with Dick, there is a genuine lack of meaningful dialog on these key subjects, within the majority of traditional marine publications. The result is, boat buyers and boat owners don't know what they don't know, and if they ever find out, it's often the hard way, after making a purchase, and possibly after finding themselves in harm's way as a result of making the wrong decisions.

Another subscriber, Barry Rutten, shared his frustrations as well, saying, *"I applaud your entrepreneurial bravery, and look forward to the next chapter in your progression. This industry sorely lacks a truly independent and powerful voice that represents the interests of boat owners. Too much is chalked up to "it's a boat" and too many in the industry do not take ownership of the outcome, leaving boaters in the*

*lurch financially, and from an enjoyment and safety standpoint. I had a very bad new build experience and have already suffered substantial losses from builder error and refusal of warranty claims."*

It pains me to hear the sentiments like Dick's and Barry's, regarding the marine industry, however, at her same time these thoughts also inspire me, to empower boat buyers and owners with the tools they need to ensure an enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

The attitude of the marine industry as a whole must change if it, if we, are to survive. While I see improvement, there's still much work to do. A few months ago a professional captain, who was skippering a vessel I was inspecting, showed me his card, handing it to me with a smirk on his face and an unrestrained chuckle. In addition to his contact information it said, "It's not my fault you bought a boat". I was aghast and worked hard to offer a restrained response, saying "You have no business being in the boat business". That's an attitude the industry can do without, and while I can pound that sentiment into fellow members of the trade at each opportunity I get, I believe you, the boat buyer and boat owner, the paying customer, have the real power to effect change.

Again, I will continue to work diligently, to afford you the means to do this. For my colleagues and marine industry readers, those of you who are doing right by your customers, feel free to share with me your thoughts and ideas, I'll post the worthy ones here.

This month's article, "A Tale of Two Messages" is apropos of this very subject, sending the right message to marine industry customers. I hope you find it useful.

**Steve D'Antonio**

Editor

## Mailbag

Hi Steve,

I have read your last couple of articles on alarms and wanted to make you aware of this gadget, the Pump Alarm [www.pumpalarm.com](http://www.pumpalarm.com)

I have been using it for over a year now and it works perfectly. My goal was to find an alarm that would allow me to know if the boat had lost AC power. Our docks now have the system that detects leakage in the water and it shuts down 10-20 slips when it goes off. It goes off fairly often in the summer due to badly wired boats. The one in Traverse City goes off daily in the summer! Usually someone puts it right back on again. However, if it is off for a while or a cord gets kicked out, etc., etc. it sure is nice to know before the freezer melts, etc.

This unit texts you when the power goes off or on. You can also interrogate the unit via text. I just use it to monitor power although as you will see it can monitor two water locations too.

Very neat gadget and only \$200. The first year subscription was free and it is \$30 per year thereafter.

Best

Howard W. Newkirk

G'Day Steve,

In the last issue of Passage Maker, I recalled reading a question and your response concerning alternators.

Unfortunately, I can't find my copy to give you the specifics, but the essential stuff is this.

The writer wrote that he had a Delco 24 SI installed on his Cummins engine. He installed a Balmar MC 614 regulator, which didn't solve his problem.

I have I have a pair of Electro-Maax 180 A units, each with a MC614 regulator, and a center fielder, installed on Yanmar 4JH4E engines. To keep them from overheating, I had to de-rate them using the belt load manager function in the MC-614. In addition I replaced the stock Yanmar belt guards with ones made out of expanded metal to improve the air flow around the engines.

The Delco Remy 24 SI has an internal regulator, with no provision for using an external alternator. Thus, I would like to know how this was done. I would love to replace the Electro-Maax 180 A units with a pair of Delco Remy 24 SI alternators. But, I also want to keep my smart regulators.

Any help will be appreciated.

John Reynolds

John:

Virtually any alternator can be externally regulated, although most are not designed for external regulation. Some alternators use semi-exposed, bolt on regulators. When removed, the wiring that attaches them to the alternator is accessed, and connected to an external regulator. In other cases, an alternator can be opened by an alternator shop technician, or a savvy do it yourselfer, to access the field wiring. Ideally, the wiring is brought outside the alternator using a stud or bushing.

However, the real issue is your overheating Electro-Maax alternators. Rather than switching to stock, non-heavy duty alternator, you should instead identify the source of the

overheating. These proprietary, heavy duty, high output alternators shouldn't overheat under normal operating conditions, even when charging large battery banks as that's what they are designed to do. The fact that you have two of them and both are overheating makes me even more suspicious, you should have more than enough capacity to keep them from being over-loaded, and you've de-rated them.

Before deep-sixing these work horses, check the installation to make sure they are equipped with the correct fans (there are bi-directional, straight fin, and mono-directional, slanted fin, fans, if the latter, and the incorrect rotation, they can lead to overheating). Most engines are counterclockwise rotation (when viewed from the flywheel end), which means the pulleys on the front turn clockwise, as do the alternator fans. If the fans are the mono-directional, slanted variety the fans should be turning with the scoop side away from the direction of rotation. Counterclockwise alternator fans are rare, they are designed for clockwise rotation gasoline engines, however, and there are thousands of them out there, so this is a possibility that should be eliminated. Fans should draw air through the back and then center of the alternator and expel it out the front. If the belt guard is too restrictive, I've modified some to improve this scenario, it too can upset the airflow. Glazed, slipping belts can also lead to alternator overheating.

Heavy duty alternator cases are designed to operate at temperatures as high as about 180°F and the actual stator as high as 250°F.

Dear Steve,

I know you are busy and I would not bother you with this but I have run out of good source information. I am hauled out in the Philippines on my 40' Valiant. I just replaced the strut

mounted shaft bearing, Cutless bearing. This is the first replacement in at least 2,200 hours and the first time in the last 9 years since I have become owner of this 38 year old boat. Where the one inch prop shaft rides on the bearing, it has very small circular groves which I can see and feel with my thumb nail. It appears tiny bits of sand may have lodged in the old bearing. I have sanded this area with 400 grit paper. The clearance between the shaft and bearing is .005 inches. The clearance is .001 less elsewhere on the shaft. I am inclined to have a new shaft fabricated but from what I am told, the tolerances and handling of materials here in the Philippines is not equal to what one would expect in more yacht knowledgeable locations. My question; should I be concerned about the circular groves wearing improperly on the new seal and possibly causing premature ware?

Thanks in advance for your insight,

Patrick Childress

SV Brick House

Patrick:

When it comes to shaft bearings there are several factors that must be taken into account. For a one-inch diameter shaft, the maximum permissible undersize diameter is a scant 0.001". Wear greater than this, however, doesn't necessarily condemn the shaft, it's more of a shaft manufacturing standard, i.e. you wouldn't accept a new shaft that was more than 0.001" undersized. In the area of the shaft bearing, the clearance between it and the shaft should not be less than 0.003" or greater than 0.007". Therefore, if the shaft is worn yet the clearance remains within tolerance, there's no issue. Greater clearance typically leads to rumbling, but not failure per se.

In the case of the scoring, this is often indicative of incorrect alignment, rather than a contamination issue, as the shaft passes through the bearing. When reinstalling the

shaft, it would be beneficial to ensure the clearances around the shaft, at both the front and back, are within the tolerance.

Sanding or “dressing” the scoring will likely result in an undersized shaft, however, you’ve indicated that the maximum clearance between the shaft and bearing is 0.005”, which is within tolerance. Dressing the area will also reduce the likelihood of the new bearing being damaged by the shaft; it makes good sense if you don’t intend to replace the shaft.

Provided the shaft is parallel with the bearing, and centered on it, this would be an acceptable alternative. Once again, if the clearance is greater, there’s little danger of failure, it may simply create vibration or noise. More importantly, make certain the shaft is properly aligned with the bearing.

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**Ask Steve questions should be addressed to [info@stevedmarineconsulting.com](mailto:info@stevedmarineconsulting.com). Please include your full name and home port. Concise questions are more likely to be answered.**

## **Special Offer for SDMC Marine Systems Excellence Readers**

After running the last two month’s columns on monitoring systems I received a number of e mails from readers sharing their thoughts, and solutions, regarding monitoring systems. I also received a few notes from folks asking me if I knew of an affordable, remote cellular messaging system that could send them an SMS text in the event of an onboard anomaly. I do know of such a system; I contacted the manufacturer and requested that they offer SDMC Marine Systems Excellence readers a discount, which they agreed to do. The offer enables readers to receive 20% off a purchase



through July 31, 2014, when using the discount code **SDMC**. Simply visit [www.sirenmarine.com](http://www.sirenmarine.com) to place your order.

Our goal is to bring you more of these offers, for select, SDMC-approved products, in the future.

## **A Tale of Two Messages**

Text and photos by Steve D'Antonio



Many messages, beyond the literal and obvious, can be conveyed in placards, they often provide insight into the mindset of

## **the management, and how customers are perceived.**

I'm a keen observer of business practices; both within the marine industry as well as in the outside world (friends and family continue to remind me that there *is* a world outside of boats). I use the data I compile from these businesses, and my interaction with them, for seminars and training sessions I teach for boat yards, boat builders and equipment manufacturers and dealers. Invariably, at some point during a training session someone says, "But Steve, the marine industry is different because..." I relish receiving this observation as it gives me the opportunity to share my thoughts, which often go like this, "In fact, while there are things about this industry that are undeniably unique, there are, or should be, very few differences in the way we [the marine industry] interact with our customers, or the way we do business. We are more like most other customer service businesses than not". One of the reasons I gather real-world examples from businesses outside the marine field, is to exemplify the common threads that are woven through all commerce that works with individual customers.

### **Sending the Wrong Message**

While all marine industry and other, businesses have a choice in the message they convey, many don't realize it, rather than determining their goals and then setting about ways to achieve them, through excellent communication, they simply react to events. Some have better instincts than others, and sometimes it works, often it doesn't.

In the first example image, the placard, posted on the door of a café I visited, sends a very clear message, "coffee is really expensive, so we're not giving it away unless you are stuck waiting for a table, and don't even think about asking for free refills once you've been seated". It sends another message, 'we don't get the whole customer relations thing'.

This was a nice place, the service was good and so were the atmosphere and food. Why ruin it with this mean-spirited message that greets every patron front and center as soon as he or she walks up to the door? As an aside, I can't recall the last time I paid for a coffee refill at a sit down restaurant. One has to wonder if this makes good customer service sense.

This is not an unusual misstep for many businesses, take note of how many have negative, unfriendly signs posted at checkout counters or worse, on their doors as you enter, "NO SOLICITING", "NO REFUNDS", and the most egregious of all for the marine industry: "NO CASH-NO SPLASH". Are these really necessary, do they have enough of a positive impact to offset the negative message that's being sent to the bulk of otherwise good customers? I believe the answer is a resounding NO. I realize that some of these messages are necessary in retail operations; however, there are tasteful, classy ways to convey these so they send a friendly, polite message.

Sending the Right Message



**When a manufacturer or dealer goes out of their way to ensure their customers can obtain assistance, whenever it may be needed, the message is a very clear one. The engraved placard shown here sends another message, one of preference and reliability, it's not a slip of paper that can be lost or misplaced, it's actually part of the vessel.**

While there are many ways for businesses to send the wrong message, there are even more ways to send the right message. When I teach seminars on marine business communication skills I point out that positive communication

skills are self-fulfilling, the more you do it, the better the feedback from your customers, and the better it feels to deliver these messages.

While I still don't encounter as many good, positive examples as I'd like, they do exist, and they are on an upward trend, albeit too slowly for me. The accompanying image is one such example. I've known and worked with the folks at Burr Yacht Sales, in Edgewater, Maryland for years; when it comes to customer support they are single minded and exceptionally protective (some would say over-protective, not necessarily a bad thing) of their brood. They understand the value a boat owner places on being able to get in touch with a knowledgeable, empathetic and patient individual when something goes wrong.

Here's a classic example, one I've been faced with many times. It's 89° on a Saturday night and your air-conditioning quits. You call the air conditioning manufacturer's "hotline" and get a recording requesting that you call back during their normal business hours. You call the local dealer, but he too is closed. Your frustration level grows. Folks at savvy marine businesses understand this; they realize that even if it isn't their fault, even if the failure is unrelated to the equipment or its installation, the customer will associate failure with their product or service. Saying "Sorry you couldn't reach us, it was a weekend" on Monday morning just won't work, and you should never accept such a response.

The goal of the 'contact placard' is to ensure that they could be reached by their customers at any time of the day or night. They came up with a plan to achieve that goal, one that was simple but effective; permanently affix to the vessel contact information for their key staff members, folks who could answer questions whenever they arose. Doing so sends not one but several positive messages about their business, which include, 'we are always here to help you'; and 'we are confident enough in our employee retention rate to include

this information as an integral *part* of every boat we sell’.

Ultimately, the motto of any marine business should be, ‘If you’re not happy, we’re not happy’. When you encounter such treatment be sure to let those providing it know they are doing the right thing. By the same token, when you receive something less than this type of service, let those folks know too, and if their response isn’t a positive one, take your business elsewhere. And, if you are so inclined, feel free to share these stories with the SDMC Marine Systems Excellence Ezine/Blog, we’ll print those that are worth sharing with readers in our “Credit Due” column.

## **Photo Essay**



An FG series Racor turbine filter, installed aboard a new vessel. It *looks* good, so what's wrong with this set up? Plenty; FG series filters lack Underwriters Laboratories' (UL) approval for use in marine applications, which in turn means they do not comply with American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC) standards for diesel fuel systems.

Filters of this sort lack the two and a half minute flame resistance rating, which is necessary for use in these applications. They are designed for automotive and industrial

use...not for boats. If a fire were to occur in this engine room, the filter could be damaged, allowing it to dump its contents, potentially along with that of the entire fuel tank, into, and thereby feeding, the flames.

The correct filter carries an MA (its label is blue, which provides it with an easy mnemonic, blue like water), rather than FG (whose label is brown, like dirt) rating. MA filters incorporate a heat shield and metallic, rather than plastic, drain plug, affording them the desired flame resistance. If your filter doesn't comply, provided it's not on an inspected vessel, the good news is you can retrofit the necessary components, heat shield and metallic drain plug, or better still a UL approved metallic drain valve with a plug, for far less than the cost of a new MA series filter. Savvy do-it-yourselfers can undertake this project in less than an hour, while cleaning the inside of the filter housing in the process.

**For more information on the services provided by Steve D'Antonio Marine Consulting, Inc. please e mail Steve at [info@stevedmarineconsulting.com](mailto:info@stevedmarineconsulting.com) or call 804-776-0981**