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GADGET QUEST

Words and wisdom from the prophet of product.

The way-too-big Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas (it takes up four convention centers!) But with 2,700 manufacturers showing 35,000 gizmos and gadgets, there are plenty that work just fine for boaters. Plus electronics manufacturers like Garmin, Uniden, Cobra, Magellan and others who produce gadgets for a broad range of categories, have a big presence at the show.

Speaking of Garmin, it has added two new units to its popular Rino line, which offers two-way radio communication combined with GPS. That means not only can you chat with a buddy up to about 14 miles away, but if you're both using the built-in location-reporting feature, your spot will show up on his Rino unit and his location will show up on yours. The units are ruggedly built and the two new top-of-the-line models—the 520 and 530—feature full-color screens.

In addition to being a two-way radio and a

full-featured GPS, the Rino 530 has an electronic compass, barometric altimeter and a NOAA weather receiver. It's also capable of receiving NOAA alerts, which is important if you're out on the water and not aware that bad weather is moving in your direction.

Garmin's optional MapSource software adds information on lakes, boat ramps, etc. For off-the-boat use, a rechargeable lithium-ion battery can power the unit for up to 16 hours. The Rino 530 is water-resistant and priced at about \$500. You can check out the features of the five-model Rino line at www.garmin.com.

ICP Solar was featuring its high-output Sunsei solar chargers. By fast-charging your deep-cycle batteries, a solar charger can let you enjoy extended time at anchor without worrying if there will be enough power to restart the engines.

It can keep your batteries up as you power your radio, GPS, depthfinder, navigation system, bilge pumps, laptop, DVD player, VHF, flat-screen TV, high-powered sound system and cabin lights. (It's fun roughing it on the water, isn't it?) And right now sun power is still free because no utility company has found a way to put a meter on its output.

ICP Solar also says that its Sunsei line is

DICK'S PICKS

ROCK STAR

Oakley, famous for its precision sunglasses, started the Thump line, a combination of its high-tech sunglasses and a miniature built-in MP3 player. Now it has introduced a higher-tech model, the Thump2. I tried a pair and not only did it make me look trendy, it offered impressive music playback.

The new design lets you listen to more of your favorite tunes because it offers memory storage up to 1 GB, which is roughly 240 songs. I like the design because the MP3 player is fully integrated so there are no dangling cords. There are 256 MB and 512 MB versions too, but because everything is built into the frame, you can't add additional memory.

On a single charge you'll get up to six hours of playback time and a three-color indicator light lets you keep track of the battery level. Prices range from about \$300 to \$450. Visit www.oakley.com.

FLASH OF LIGHT

Here's a neat gizmo for those times when you wish you could bend your flashlight to shine the beam in an almost inaccessible spot. Nite Ize, as in "night eyes" makes Fiber Optic Adapters that allow you to turn almost any flashlight into a light-bending torch. Lock one or these adapters over the flashlight lens and you can illuminate the smallest area.

There's another advantage too. Since the adapter is super thin, it doesn't take up the space a flashlight would, so there's more room to use a tool in a tight area. And if you put the flashlight down, the ridges on the flexible cap design prevent it from rolling.

The Fiber Optic Adapters are made in two diameters to accommodate most AA- and AAA-size flashlights. They're available in 4.5-, 7- and 20-inch lengths. Costs range from about \$6 to \$9. See www.niteize.com.

