



AIS? Say What?

by VINCENT T. PICA, II

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In the "technology gamesmanship" between the Have's and the Have Not's, each time two mariners (or golfers, tennis aficionados or "Internuts") get together, inevitably the "tech question du jour" comes up. In our father's days, it was "did you get a VHF radio yet?" or perhaps a "What do you think about LORAN?" In our younger days, it was, "hey, have you put GPS aboard yet? I have and it is faaaaanntastic!" As the price of hardware came down, we even got into discussion about radar (see SSP, "Radar for the Private Boater - Eye Ayes!", 12/19/07), which for most people was considered only a tool for the military and commercial mariners. But, for the same reason (lowering costs), now AIS is part of the tech jargon. This column is about that.

AIS is what?

AIS is the Automatic Identification System, operated by the US Coast Guard here in the United States. The International Maritime Organization's (IMO) International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) "requires AIS to be fitted aboard international voyaging ships with gross tonnage of 300 or more tons, and all passenger ships regardless of size." It is estimated that more than 40,000 ships currently carry AIS class A equipment. Clearly, by the prior description, it is and has been intended for the "big boys." What does it do? It links all AIS-equipped vessels together via satellite/GPS technology.

Well, doesn't my radio do that essentially? Not unless you or the opposing skipper see each other and

decide to open up a channel. AIS broadcasts continuously. And it broadcasts plenty - directly on to your radar screen, or chart plotter or GPS screen. It will tell you, for any AIS-equipped ship within VHF-radio range, its speed and heading, which is critical in understanding if there is a threat of collision. It will also tell you when and where it will happen if both of you maintain your present course and speed (that's when the "CPA", i.e., Closest Point of Approach, is zero...)

But any good radar system these days will give you that data. True. If the radar sees the opposing vessel, it can. While many objects can block a radar return, VHF goes in a straight line, to infinity essentially, and won't be (completely) blocked by bridges, wave or rain scatter and the like.



It will even give you the vessel's name amongst other characteristic information so, when you put out a "security call" during a transit ("secure-a-tay, secure-a-tay, secure-a-tay, this is the M/V Charlie westbound on the rhumb line from Montauk to New York City, all vessels on opposing course, please be advised"), you can say, "Hailing M/V Monica, eastbound on the rhumb line from New York City to Montauk, this is the M/V Charlie on a reciprocal course, 10 miles ahead. Suggest we both go to starboard and open up a lane between us." How cool would that be...?

The US Coast Guard has noted that AIS might replace RACONS, or radar beacons, currently used for

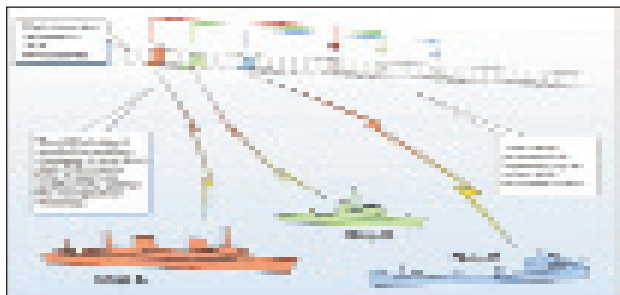
electronic navigation aids. And, if buoys and beacons can transmit their data, it will be a further aid when aid is mostly needed - poor visibility and crowded seaways. And don't be surprised if you hear about Virtual AIS. In one example, an AIS transmission describes the position of buoy but the signal itself originates from a transmitter located in a USCG station miles away and on land. For example, an on-shore base station might broadcast the position of a string of channel markers, each of which is too small to contain a transmitter itself. In another example, AIS could transmit the image of a marker which does not exist physically but now marks a transient situation, like a sunken vessel or channel that had shoaled over. Although such aids would only be visible to AIS-equipped ships, this would be a lot cheaper - and faster - than physical markers.

OK, How Do I Get One?!

Well, "what should I get" is probably a better question. AIS transponders come in two classes. Class-A really IS for the big guys - it is a fully integrated system, costing \$3,000-\$5,000 and is technologically beyond most private skippers in complexity and size. With that said, for \$600-\$900, there is a Class-B transponder which can be integrated into your existing electronics package. The best device to integrate it with is your chart plotter. And, most importantly, Class-A AIS systems can see Class-B and vice-versa...

One last thing: AIS "hates" to be close to AIS, meaning, it is self-arming. You set the perimeter or zone of safety and, if another AIS-equipped boat enters that zone, the alarm goes off. And, on your chart plotter, you see its heading, speed, position and name. Immediately. This is one of the reasons I have AIS on my boat (I have the ACR Class-B AIS but there are several good ones out there.)

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2010@aol.com or go direct to John Blevins, who is in charge of new members matters, at FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."



FISHING WITH TONY GO NORTH YOUNG MAN GO NORTH

by TONY SALERNO

When Editor in Chief Sal Amendolia of Nor' East Saltwater Magazine told me how good the fishing was up in his neck of the woods, I became quite excited. Sal asked me to join him and his fishing pal Bobby this past Friday. We launched Sal's Sea Pro from a private ramp inside Stonybrook Harbor.

Heading toward our destination, I took a seat, as it was 30 minutes away at Mount Misery Shoal just north of Mt. Sinai Harbor. I took in the sights and what sights indeed. As we pulled away from the ramp and made our way into Porpoise Channel, there were literally thousands of striped bass swirling and splashing the surface as they devoured pounds and pounds of small sand eels that seem to be clogging the waters of the Sound so far this season. "Aren't we going to stop and plug up a few?" was my question to Sal. "No Bobby and I are fluke diehards we see this all spring long" was Sal's reply. Great I thought to myself, all the bass action you can dream about and I'm left doing just that, dreaming.

A half hour later we arrived at our destination in 22 feet of water and almost immediately, as our bait hit the water, Bobby and I had the first two fish of the day, both keepers with one at 22 inches and the other 23. "Looks as if will be going home in no time with our limit if this keeps up" I remarked. Well my remark turned out to be a jinx as the three of us fished the next several hours for over 30 more fluke, but unfortunately we could only cull out one more keeper out of the bunch. Still all in all, you couldn't ask for a better day weather-wise and the action stayed pretty steady all day. What else can you ask for?

That is the story up on the north shore right now, plenty of striped bass in the harbors, while the Long Island Sound is chock full of bluefish, stripers and fluke. Bass and bluefish action has been red hot up and around Buoy 11 by Port Jeff Harbor. Anglers are trolling, casting tins and plugs, or using clams to nail the gamesters. Fluke are heavily concentrated east of Port Jeff closer to Miller Place by buoy 9. Bucktails tipped with spearing or sand eels on either moving tide is doing the trick.



Gerard Nappe with a 10 pound bluefish Caught from the Cranberry Dock in Mastic

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