

SPOT SATELLITE GPS MESSENGER

By Capt. John N. Ragusa



Now with its next-generation communications product officially launched in marine outlets from coast to coast, the SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger continues to offer boaters a reasonable alternative to provide emergency assistance if and when trouble finds you out on the water.

NEW AND IMPROVED

SPOT, a leader in personal satellite messaging and emergency communications recently introduced its new SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger. The new SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger is 30% smaller and lighter than the original SPOT Satellite personal tracker, offers additional custom messaging modes, and uses a state-of-the-art GPS chipset and satellite communications to provide enhanced reliability and performance. I was able to field test one of the prototype units at last fall's Ft. Lauderdale Boat Show and this new satellite messenger is definitely more capable than the original. Besides being smaller and lighter than its predecessor at less than 6 ounces, the new SPOT messenger also adds some unique capabilities like a GPS Acquisition light, a "Message Sending" indicator light, a dedicated GPS Tracking button, a new dedicated pre-programmable Custom Message button, protective covers over the S.O.S and Help buttons to prevent inadvertent message transmission, illuminated buttons, a case, plus the user's choice of color between either orange or silver.

Equipped with two notification LED's and six function buttons, the new SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger transmits activated messages based on varying levels of need, including: "OK/Check-in" lets contacts know where you are and that you're okay; "Track Progress" sends and saves your location and allows contacts to track your progress in real-time using Google Maps; "Help" notifies your contacts or SPOT Assist professional services of your GPS location and need for assistance; "SOS/911 Alert" notifies an emergency rescue coordination center of your GPS location; the "Custom Message" button sends a pre-programmed message to your personal contacts. It sounds simple and it works.

SPOT TEAMS WITH BOAT U.S.

Back in February at the Miami Boat Show, SPOT announced that it had signed an agreement with Boat U.S., the nation's leading advocate for recreational boaters and Boat U.S. Towing Services. The agreement provides increased service options for SPOT Assist customers, targeted to improve boater communication using the SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger. SPOT Assist will now offer integrated on-the-water towing benefits in partnership with Boat U.S. The new on-water towing service option will be available using the recently announced SPOT Assist service. SPOT Assist integrates optional third party services such as

roadside assistance or boat towing. SPOT Assist will offer North American SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger users 24-hour, seven-day-a-week service benefits.

"The boating community has been using the SPOT Satellite Messenger for peace-of-mind, tracking their voyages and communicating with their families while offshore," said Tom Colby, chief operating officer of Globalstar Inc., and president of SPOT LLC. "Boaters tell us they have a need for reliable non-emergency assistance as well, such as when an engine won't start or when a battery dies. By expanding SPOT Assist to include Boat U.S. 24-hour on-the-water towing dispatch services for recreational boaters, we are helping to ensure quick response for our customers and Boat U.S. members."

SPOT Satellite Messenger sends your GPS location over a reliable global satellite network to friends and family from virtually any location around the world independent of cellular networks or radio communication. The partnership between SPOT and Boat U.S. Towing Services will allow boaters aboard to simply press the "Help" button on the SPOT device which will notify Boat U.S.'s 24-hour towing dispatch centers of their GPS position every five minutes for one hour.

According to Boat U.S. Towing Service's Jerry Cardarelli, "Our TowBoat U.S. and Vessel Assist towing fleet handles over 60,000 requests for on-the-water assistance from recreational boaters each year. Our biggest challenge is getting accurate location information from a disabled vessel. Also, too many boaters don't have a VHF radio aboard and rely on cell phones as their only way of communicating. Cell phone coverage is often spotty offshore, and doesn't do well in some coastal areas. SPOT gives us the information to reduce response times and get the disabled boat back to its homeport or launch ramp." Since its introduction in December 2007, the SPOT Satellite Messenger has transmitted more than 5,000,000 messages world-wide including non-emergency "peace-of-mind" and "track me" messages, so it looks like they are gaining in popularity as an alternate emergency contact methodology and are likely here to stay.

PRICING AND AVAILABILITY

SPOT Satellite Messenger generally retails for \$169.99 or less. SPOT Assist is available in two service offerings, specifically Boat U.S. Towing Services and national roadside assistance, and includes unlimited basic SPOT service. Pricing for 24-hour on-the-water towing dispatch starts at \$19 annually which includes the basic Boat U.S. membership and can be upgraded to include additional service levels up to Unlimited Towing.

Well, there you have it: a better marine "mousetrap". I have the original SPOT assist GPS satellite messenger, but will be upgrading soon to the new and improved version and suggest that you consider doing the same. For more information, visit www.findmespot.com.

