

Feeling sluggish? It might be time to repower your boat

March 2003

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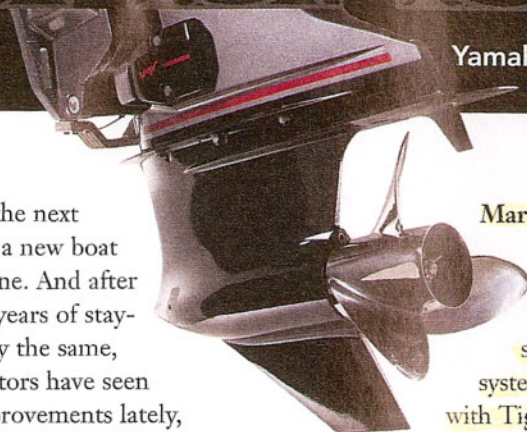
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Better Boating

By Design

You don't have to own a new boat to get the benefits of these great innovations.

Boaters are easily seduced. We like bright, shiny, new things, especially after a long, dark winter spent prowling the aisles of boat shows, feeling like a 6-year-old during the run up to Christmas. Something about a pristine, polished pontoon or a crisp, clean cruiser leashed to a fake dock under fake palm trees has a way of making Ol' Betsy back in the garage seem awfully dowdy. Sure, you could take a day and polish Ol' Betsy up — and you probably will — but that won't fill the weird, innate need you have that screams, "Get something new!" To answer that call, you need something substantial, something you can show off. It doesn't have to be a whole new boat, but it better be the next best thing.



Yamaha's Bent Skeg

Technically, the next best thing to a new boat is a new engine. And after close to 100 years of staying essentially the same, outboard motors have seen dramatic improvements lately, from the development of high-output 4-strokes to fuel-injected 2-strokes that run cleaner, quieter and stronger than ever. **Yamaha's** (www.yamaha-motor.com) new V Max series of engines, particularly the top-line HPDI models, are prime examples of the kind of advances taking place in the outboard world, from direct injection to microcomputer ignition. But it also has something that really sets it apart from the roaring crowd — a skeg that's like nothing else.

Some are calling Yamaha's new skeg design the "bent skeg," but that's not quite accurate. The skeg's not bent, it's concave, although it almost looks bent because it's so out of the ordinary. (Actually, it looks most like a cartoon skeg that's been forced through a particularly tight spot.) The concave design, according to Yamaha, "dramatically reduces" steering torque, so the engine's lower unit cuts a straighter line through the water while accelerating and decelerating. More importantly, the concave skeg helps the lower unit (and therefore the hull) track straighter at full throttle, which seriously reduces chine walk, one of the most unpleasant aspects of running wide open.

Full-throttle outboards may bring bass boats to mind, but the anglers aren't the only ones who use outboards. Virtually all pontoons are powered by outboards, and it's no longer an oddity to see a pontoon pulling a wakeboarder or inflatable rider. Pontoon performance is NOT an oxy-moronic phrase these days, and **Conrad**

Marine's (www.conradmarine.com) T.A.P. fin system is designed to take that performance one step beyond. The T.A.P. system (not to be confused with Tigé's TAPS) consists of full-length aluminum fins that are

attached to the inside and outside of the pontoons at the waterline. The fins work by redirecting the pontoons' spray "negatively," that is, down and away, creating a sort of hydrofoil effect for increased lift and a drier, better-handling ride.

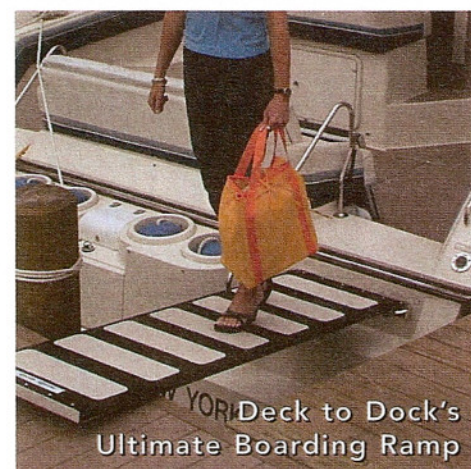
In addition to the added performance benefits, the T.A.P. system — unlike traditional pontoon "lifting strakes" that effectively increase the pontoons' bottom surface area — can be used with standard marina lifts and even standard bunked trailers. And since the T.A.P. system is welded to the pontoons, durability is all but assured.

Pontoons share outboard power with bass boats, but they share the problem of boarding with cruisers. If you're young and nimble, getting from dock to deck is usually no big deal, but if you're a little less limber than you used to be, or even if you're simply carrying the usual excess of stuff aboard for a day on the water, that "one small step for (a) man" can seem like a leap across a great ocean. That's why boarding ramps, although they may not seem sexy, are essential. And while they may not seem like something that can be improved, they can. **Deck to Dock's** (www.decktodock.com) Ultimate Boarding Ramp is a 19-pound carbon-fiber gangway that can support 800 pounds, enough to drive a motorcycle on board if you have a mind to.

The Ultimate Boarding Ramp is attached to the boat by either aluminum



Conrad Marine's T.A.P. system



or stainless-steel mounting brackets that allow the deck to be removed and stowed while underway. Standard lengths of 6, 7 and 8 feet work for most boats, and custom lengths up to 18 feet cover pretty much anything this side of a megayacht, although at 20 inches in width, the Ultimate Boarding Ramp may not accommodate all wheelchairs. (If that's a concern, measure first.) The bottom of the ramp is covered with UHMW, a highly durable polyethylene that's imper-