TWEAKING THE BEAST

Staying Ahead Of The Equipment Curve

Story By BILL PARLATORE

It's been three years since we launched *Growler,* our 36-foot lobster boat. We've taken her to the Bahamas, New England, up and down the ICW, and around Chesapeake Bay. The boat has served us well, even though my continuing busy travel schedule results in less time to use our boat as much as I would like. Like everything in life, it is a timing thing. But I see light at the end of the tunnel: a day when I'll have more time to be aboard.

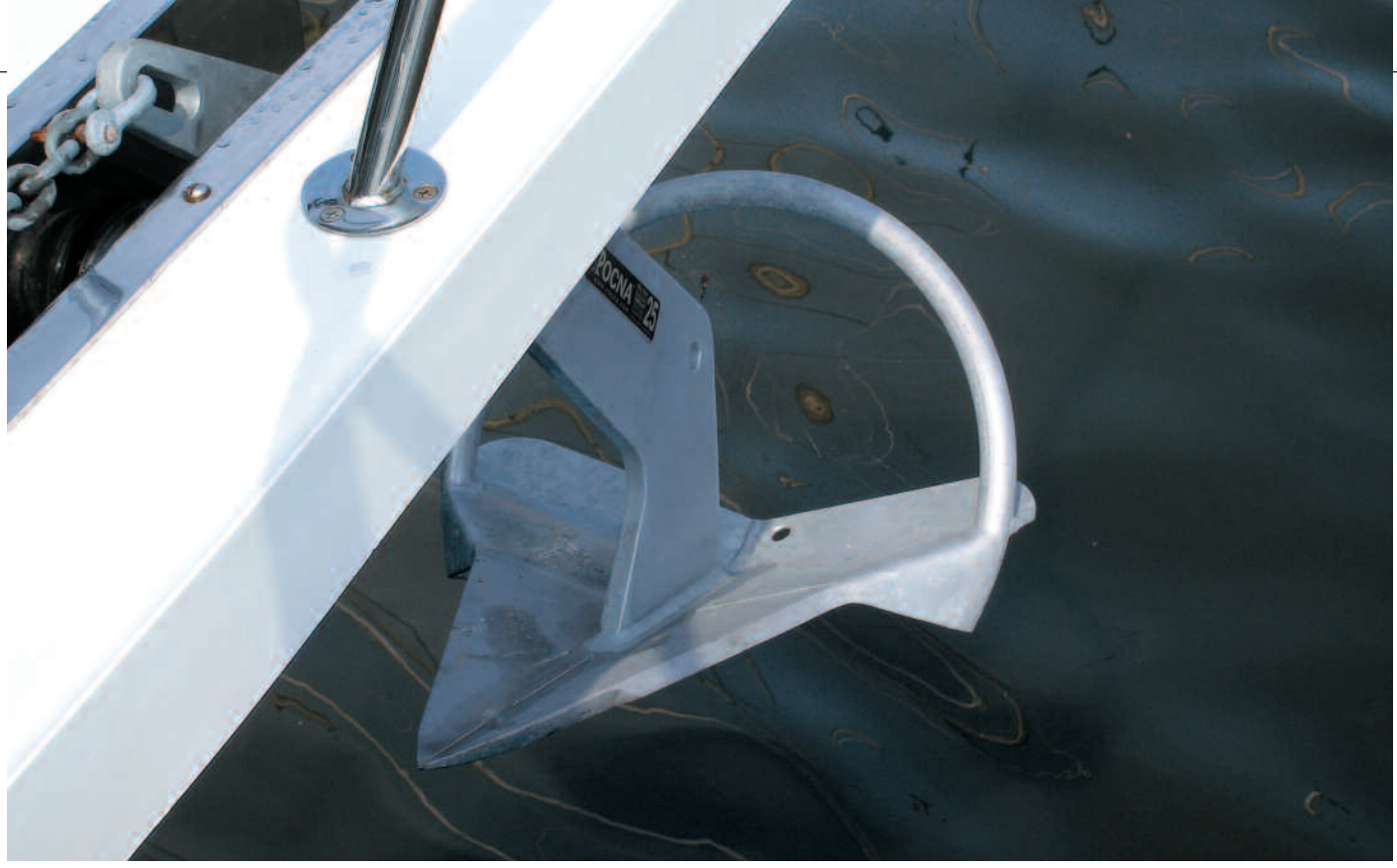
An amazing aspect of the marine industry is how much changes from year to year, and it has been four years since we first commissioned the building of our Zimmerman 36. More new products than I can count have come out, and ever-changing and improving technology continues to frustrate anyone who insists on having the best and latest equipment.

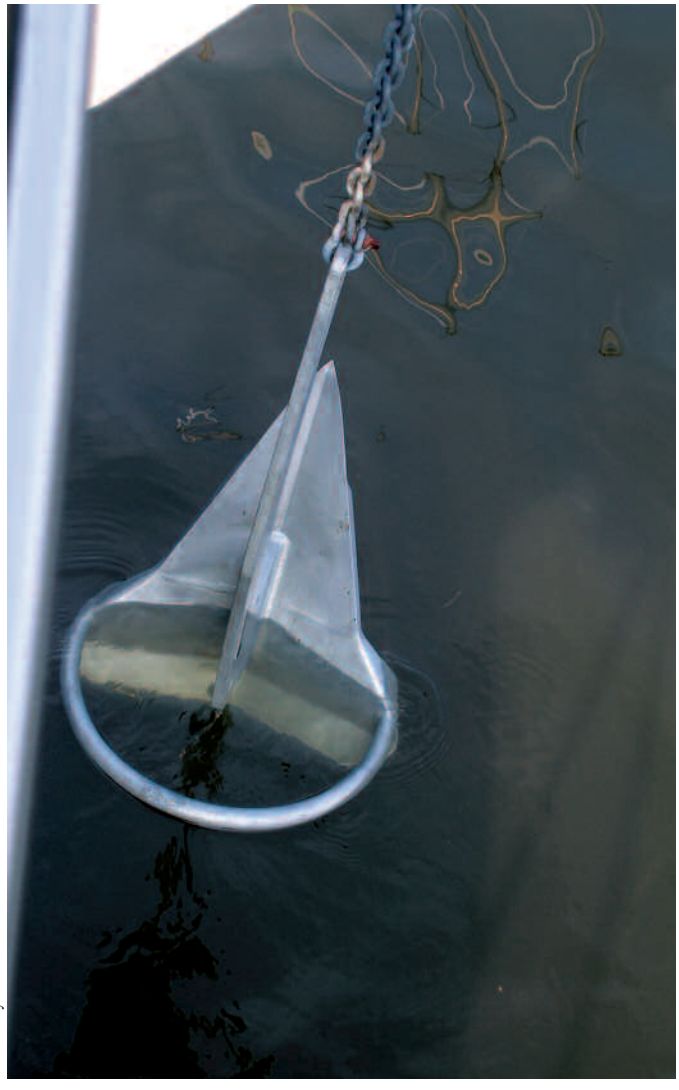
So over this season, I decided to try a couple of new products and update some equipment already on board. The gear we originally selected has done its job with very few problems, and I'm glad that the choices were made by an experienced builder who knows what works and what doesn't. Very little of the decision making of what went into this boat was based on chance.

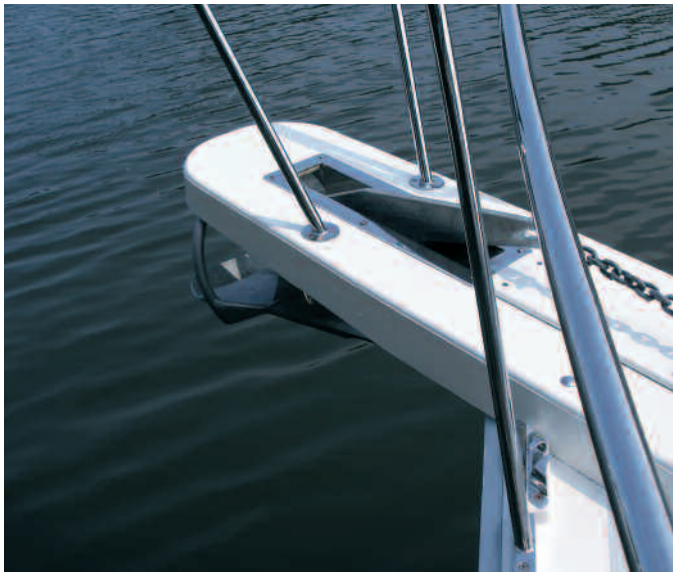
I thought it would be helpful to describe some of this season's projects and my experiences with the results, as such first-hand experience can be quite useful to others contemplating similar projects.

LIVING WITH RICH DETAIL

Growler's existing NavNet chart plotter and radar have worked flawlessly since the boat was launched. If any complaint could be had, it would be about the redraw







Photos by Bill Parlatore

Top: The Rocna is all business, a great example of form following function. Left: Another angle of the anchor as it is lowered into the water. The large surface area of the blade tends to bring up bottom material, which, in Chesapeake Bay, is mostly heavy mud and clay. Above: The Rocna sits perfectly in the twin bow rollers, ready to self-deploy with ease.

AN ANCHOR THAT ROCKS

The primary anchor on *Growler* has been a 45-lb. CQR. The plow has done us proud, and I have had no problems with it, although I know some folks don't care for the plow. I've also had good experience with a Bruce anchor on previous boats. I guess my anchoring success

has much to do with my tendency to put big anchors on my boats, and then to use chain, and lots of it. I only had to drag once many years ago to take ground tackle seriously. (My wife calls me nuts for my tendency to overkill. When I hang a picture in our home, it will stay put during an earthquake. My house also has more epoxy in it than most. So it's not surprising that I wanted to try a bigger anchor on *Growler*. But it didn't fit very well, and we stuck with the builder's standard choice.)

Then I visited New Zealand to tour Steve and Linda Dashew's new *Wind Horse,* built by Kelly Archer (*PMM* Dec. '05). Steve Dashew has this huge, monster anchor on his new aluminum yacht, and that was when I first became acquainted with the Rocna. In my mind, Steve's experience and preference for anchoring was a big endorsement of the Rocna.

So when I returned home, I ordered a Rocna for *Growler* to check it out myself. It is a 55-lb. anchor and it looks mean. Seeing it for the first time in its box at Zimmerman's yard, I was reminded of the caged velociraptor in *Jurassic Park*. No anchor looks more serious than a Rocna. Similar in general appearance to the German Bügel, it is the Hummer of anchors.

Over the winter, one of Zimmerman's techs modified the bow rollers to handle the shank dimensions of the new anchor, allowing it to self-deploy. Visually, I think it sits beautifully on *Growler*'s bow, and the combination of this anchor, an all-chain rode, and the powerful Ideal windlass provide me one of the best anchor programs I could put aboard our boat.

And it has proven to be an awesome anchoring system. A 55-lb. anchor may be excessive for a 20,000-lb. boat, but it digs in where it is dropped and holds *Growler* dead in her tracks. I find we don't really need to back down as much with this anchor. At Trawler Fest in Poulsbo, Washington, Steve Dashew told the attendees he is quite pleased with his anchor, which is quite a testament to the Rocna, since he and Linda prefer to be at anchor all the time.

I agree with his assessment. Big, mean, and all business, the Rocna works well. If I have an issue, it is the amount of bottom it routinely brings up to the surface; the long, wide blade really scoops up the bottom when the anchor is broken loose by our powerful windlass. Thank goodness I have a washdown pump at the bow!

MAINTAINING THE SHADE

More trawlers are being equipped with expensive window treatments, overhead hatches fitted with screens for bug control, and sunshades to protect a boat's interior from constant UV invasion. Keeping a boat cool in hot weather demands more attention given most trawlers' larger windows.

One of the chief players in this field is Oceanair Marine. The company's lines of shades and screens come in a variety of shapes and configurations to fit most hatch manufacturers. *Growler* has three Oceanair hatch screens.

One recurring issue we've had on the boat is the forward hatch over the V-berth. After it had some use the first year, the screen no longer rolled up completely. We've had the yard adjust it several times. This past season, I spoke with Alex Foster of Oceanair Marine to see if he could walk me through the process of adjusting the screen. As luck would have it, he planned to be in the Annapolis area for several appointments, so we arranged to have him meet me at the boat and find a solution to my recurring problem.

Alex explained that it is common to make some adjustments after a period of time of letting the unit settle in, so to speak. He unscrewed the hatch from its wood frame and showed me how to pry off the end cap, exposing the horizontal, Venetian blind-type screen, rolled up around a spring-loaded roller. It is not a difficult task, and takes maybe 20 minutes, as long as the boatbuilder hasn't used glue or other adhesive to hold the screen under a hatch (which would make for a more problematic situation, according to Alex).

Alex also said if the unit is binding up, it may be twisted ever so slightly in its base. A simple solution is to back off the four corner screws a little to let the unit "float" under the headliner. In my case, we found an internal problem, so Oceanair replaced the unit without question.

I offer this project as something that most of us would not even imagine as requiring maintenance or adjustment. But, as I found out, simple to use but expensive window and hatch treatments, such as those from Oceanair, are the product of serious engineering and are designed to be maintained like any other complex components in a boat.

It always feels empowering to learn a new skill, such as understanding and learning how to maintain my hatch screen. Boats are great that way.

We have several other projects we hope to complete in the coming months, so you can expect to read about more cool, new gadgets in use, as well as upgrades to gear where it makes sense (and the reasoning behind those improvements). And I'm keen on learning some more obscure maintenance tricks.

Now let me go anchor in some quiet creek, roll back the shades, and spend more quality time with that Furuno manual!