



Above-deck installation on an open boat is a breakthrough enabled by the Seakeeper 3 gyro-stabilizer.

Rock Steady

Seakeeper 3 brings gyro-stabilizer technology to the center console market.

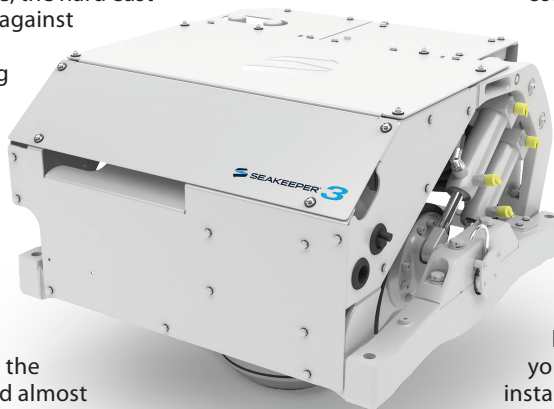
If you are one of the lucky ones who have never been overcome with sea sickness, there is no way to relate to the misery a fallen crew member endures when they go "down for the count." If you suffer from this condition it changes the offshore experience dramatically, often forcing people to simply find another hobby. What if I told you there was a device that you could install on your boat that would virtually eliminate roll by 90 percent? How would that change your life? Well it might just be the difference between staying in the boating game or taking up golf. Perhaps your spouse or kids don't enjoy the boat due to past experience with "Gulfstream flu" and never want to join you. Modern technology has brought some relief to the faint of stomach and while it may not be news to everybody, such a device does exist in the form of a gyro stabilizer.

What is a gyro stabilizer? In the simplest possible terms, a heavy flywheel rotating on a vertical shaft is housed in vacuum sealed case. The flywheel turning at a high rate of speed (8450 RPM) wants to maintain its (level) orientation. The device is allowed to pivot forward and aft on a 70-degree arc and as the boat rocks the centrifugal effect (precession) applies force on both sides of the boat, pulling up on one side and pushing down on the other. The resulting effect is your boat almost completely stops rolling. The boat

will still rise and fall with the waves but side to side motion is decreased to a bare minimum.

The first time I rode on a boat with a gyro stabilizer installed was a breezy day in Lake Worth Inlet where at the last of the falling tide, the hard east wind bucked against the outgoing water creating a very fast 3- to 4-foot washing machine like condition. We put the large center console in the trough and unlocked the Seakeeper and almost right away the boat settled into a very comfortable up and down orientation that blew my mind. Disengaging the device produced a radical side to side pitching motion that was not for the weak. I was impressed to say the least.

The gyro stabilizer is not a new invention, having been used on larger vessels for years, but a unit designed for smaller recreational boats is new and the advancing technology is making units smaller, lighter, and more affordable all the time. The recently released Seakeeper 3 is the



latest version from this company (www.seakeeper.com) designed for boats 30 to 39 feet and the trend in the industry is going smaller and more affordable which could be good news for small boaters.

There have been a few limiting factors involved with practical applications of a Seakeeper on small boats, most notably weight and size of the unit, along with cost to buy/install. These units were previously limited to larger sportfish boats, motor yachts, and ships. The introduction of the newly redesigned Seakeeper 3 brings this feature to the full-size offshore center console market. It is a 12-volt-powered and seawater/glycol cooled unit, housed in a case measuring 27" L x 27" W x 22.5" H and weighing in at 550 pounds. Due to the reduced size and weight, it is easier to find the space to install this unit than previous versions.

Formerly, a stabilizer was mounted below the deck (bilge/engine room) requiring either mounting at the time of construction on a new boat or some serious reconfiguring for a retrofit. Seakeeper has addressed this issue with the ability to mount the Model 3 above the deck.

The most practical retrofit installation utilizes a leaning seat/ tackle center box made for the Model 3 which houses the unit and replaces an existing leaning post or rocket launcher type set up behind the helm. Installing one is fairly straightforward and takes about two days. They can still be installed below the deck but this is a better option to be considered if you're buying a new boat and coordinate the installation between your manufacturer and Seakeeper directly.

The second and no small consideration is price. The Seakeeper 3 will run you roughly \$30,000 installed as a refit. That may seem high, but it's a fraction of the original cost of the earlier models for larger boats. Moreover, if it'll keep your crew happy and add to the number of days you can enjoyably, successfully fish offshore, that's value worth considering.

It's not hard to imagine a version of this scaled down for use on 20- to 30-foot boats and if the trend continues towards building these devices smaller and less expensively, this could change the boating industry in a very positive way. **FS**