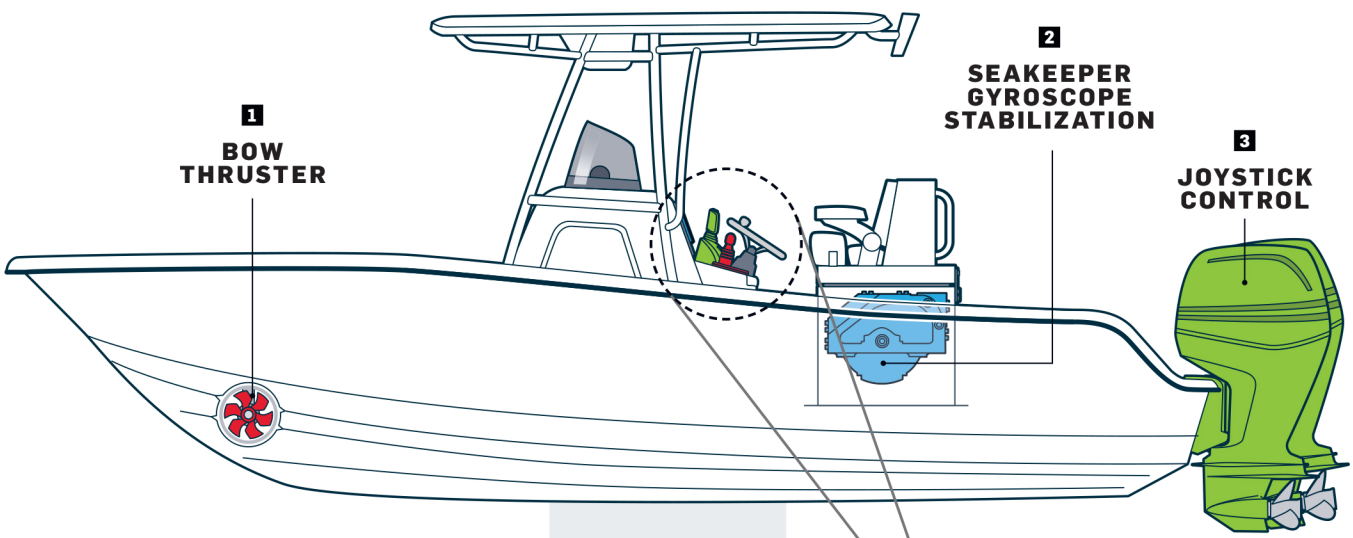

Money Well Spent

THESE GAME-CHANGING OPTIONS IMPROVE COMFORT AND PERFORMANCE.

There are many decisions to make before ordering a new boat or embarking on a makeover of your current ride.

By Capt. Dave Lear

Besides choosing the boat model and suitable power, there's storage, seating, livewells and various other features to think about. But don't forget about performance options. While they add to the initial cost, a joystick control, bow thruster and stabilization system make both navigation and fishing more enjoyable and productive in the long run.

+ Fine-Tuning Additions

1 Bow thrusters, usually found on larger boats, allow precise maneuvering in tight quarters, in wind and in current.

2 Gyro stabilization maintains a comfortable, stable platform in rough seas.

3 Joystick control allows precise positioning when docking or drifting.

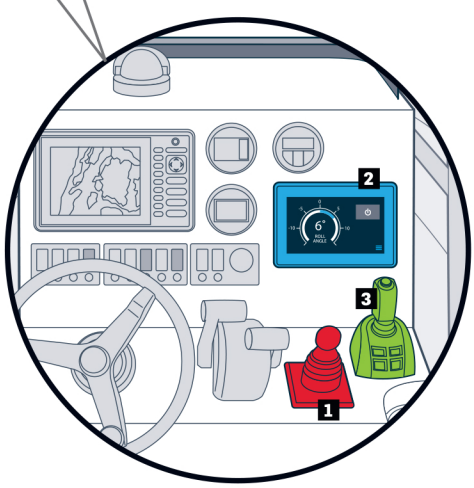

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM BARKER

Joy Ride

Mercury, Yamaha, Evinrude, Suzuki and some marine accessories companies, like SeaStar Solutions, now offer joystick controls for midsize fishing boats with two or more engine configurations. The intuitive system shifts the boat's axis from the stern to the helm and combines steering, throttle and shift functions in a single control. The joystick operation manages outboards (or diesel engines) as they vector outward or inward independently to shift the boat forward, in reverse or sideways. The boat even rotates on its axis by simply twisting the joystick. Most systems include a boost function for added thrust during tight maneuvers, while some incorporate an anchoring feature to hold the boat in a stationary position.

From a practical standpoint, joystick capability makes docking much easier and less stressful, especially for novice operators. A corner slip with surrounding obstacles in a ripping current is no match for the power boost. When there is only one spot available in a crowded fuel dock, the joystick enables you to parallel park your boat like a pro. Want to hold next to a buoy to sabiki some bait? Engage the anchor mode and flip the bail. Need to stay on top of a hot fish? Use the joystick to reverse, spin and counter every one of the fish's moves.

Forward Thrust

Does the advent of joystick control systems now make bow thrusters obsolete? Certainly not, according to

3

Joystick Control

Available from a number of manufacturers, these systems may be added to any boat with the installation of multiple outboards.

Danny Davis, customer relations and technical support manager for Grady-White Boats, who says his company regularly installs Lewmar DC-powered bow thrusters on models ranging from 27 feet up to 37 feet.

"Many customers order both a Helm Master joystick system and the bow thruster," he explains. "It makes it easier to dock in windy conditions or strong currents. The big bow flare on some boats catches the wind, so a bow thruster really comes in handy in tight quarters. Having both options provides the ultimate control, plus you have a backup, if one fails."

Davis explains that bow-thruster installation is easy at the factory level. Grady-White uses a special mold for the bow cutout and installs a fiberglass tube to house the thruster, maintaining watertight integrity. But retrofitting a boat for a bow thruster, he warns, is labor intensive, and access for the rigging is difficult on some models, adding to the expense. Ordering this feature on a new boat is usually better than adding it later.

1

Bow Thrusters

Generally installed during the factory build stage, as retrofitting is complicated.

Bye-Bye Rock and Roll

Another performance option that's now available for midsize craft is the Seakeeper stabilization system. The compact SK 3, released in April, is designed for 30- to 39-foot boats. Inside an encapsulated vacuum, the flywheel spins at speeds of up to 10,700 rpm. When the boat rolls, an active gyro tilts, producing the torque needed to counteract the roll. The vacuum reduces the heat and noise from the flywheel and keeps components protected from corrosion. Power is supplied by a 12-volt battery, so a generator is not required.

"The SK 3 is our smallest and lightest unit yet, and it's a game changer," says Andrew Semprevivo, Seakeeper's COO. "It reduces roll at levels we never envisioned. On boats with a deeper deadrise and narrower beam, the gyro is much more impactful. We're seeing 95 to 97 percent reduction in our tests."

Retrofit Gyro

Seakeeper is working with top builders like Contender, Yellowfin, Scout, Invincible and Regulator on factory installations. And to satisfy the large demand for retrofitting existing boats, the company is collaborating with Nautical Design to offer a companion leaning post that houses the SK 3 and also includes a tackle center, rod holders and premium seating.

"The leaning post is a great mounting solution, since it keeps the unit at the center of gravity for optimum weight distribution," Semprevivo says. "Installing Seakeeper will impact every person on board, whether they are running the boat, reeling in baits, or fighting fish. When the gyro is on, the boat simply doesn't roll. It becomes neutrally buoyant. And you really appreciate it once you get back to the dock. With the gyro, you're not constantly shifting your weight to stay balanced, so you're less fatigued."

A typical SK 3 installation adds a third house battery to power the system. The active gyro is constantly self-calibrating, so, except for flushing the two internal fluids at 1,000-hour intervals, little maintenance is required to maintain reliable operation. A helm-mounted touchscreen provides control. Seakeeper's SK 3 units start at $26,900, excluding the leaning post.

Digital electronics, sophisticated controls and compact gyros are changing how we operate boats. And since these advancements also make it easier to catch more fish, I'm sure most will agree that's money well spent.

2

Seakeeper Stabilization

This system lends itself to original equipment installation as well as retrofits on existing boats.