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# A Sweeter Ride to Offshore Fish

A Seakeeper install changes the game for a **smaller-boat** owner.

By David Conway, Managing Editor

Captain Ryan Van Fleet watches over a young angler, who fights a mutton snapper. Van Fleet has changed his boat's performance and ride with a Seakeeper 2, at right.

## PREPARE TO BE AMAZED.

Once a decade or so an innovation comes along that changes boating and fishing. Among those in the recent past, you'd think of the Power Pole, which made holding a spot in shallow water a snap. Then there's GPS-enabled trolling motors, which can follow a track or keep you over a spot without anchoring. Now there's another invention which changes not only the way the boat rides, but also enhances performance and fishing.

Maybe those assertions sound overblown—until you ride on a small boat with a Seakeeper, as I did recently. My friend Capt. Ryan Van Fleet of Good Karma charters in Tavernier is the first small boat owner in the country to have a Seakeeper 2 installed. He had one of the first ten Seakeeper 2 units off the production line—made for boats 27 to 32 feet—installed on his Sailfish 2360 in late June. In mid-July, after he'd run it through its paces, I went fishing with him and immediately felt the improvement in ride, stability and handling. The typical rocking and rolling was removed from the ride—we were at a steady level with the horizon the entire trip. Even more importantly, afterwards I felt none of the typical wear on my body from a day at sea.

Neither did my young son, whom I'm cautious with on boats offshore. He scampered across the deck hooking up muttons, kings and amberjacks without missing a step. Neither does Capt. Ryan's wife, who fishes with him.

**N**either do his customers. Longtime Good Karma charter client Mike Meir says, "Normally, even in reasonably calm waters, half of your efforts are spent bracing yourself and making sure you don't take a bath. But with the Seakeeper, you don't have to worry about what the boat's doing, and you can instead just worry about fishing. You're less tired, and more focused, which all adds up to a safer, more productive charter."

Tony Priu of Orlando, another longtime charter customer, said, "I have a tendency toward getting sea sick, and it can be overwhelming at its worst but even on a good day, without my dose of Bonine I return to the dock whooped and feeling like I ran a marathon, a small price to pay to get on some truly epic fish. Then Ryan got a Seakeeper."

"The last time I fished with Ryan was like fishing in my pool," Tony said. "We went out in 4-foot seas and were doing 30 knots in no time. I was surprised how dry we were.

Not getting bounced around keeps the spray away from the boat and makes moving around on deck a whole lot easier and safer. When we were done we weren't all beat up. It's a whole new experience in fishing, one that guarantees I'll be able to keep doing this safely and comfortably for a long time."

"Even I don't feel beat up anymore," adds Capt. Ryan. "Prior to the Seakeeper, at the end of a typical 5- to 15-day stretch of charters which included anchor fishing for snappers, my body was in bad shape and I was just beat down. I would spend 1 to 2 days recovering. Now, at the end of each day, I jump off the boat and go to bed at night feeling great, no aches or pains. I can work longer hours and more days without getting tired. Every day I wake up feeling like I wasn't fishing on a boat the previous day. No doubt, it's a game changer for me," Capt. Ryan says.

A bit about the calculus behind Capt. Ryan's decision to make the sizeable invest-

ment of a Seakeeper in his boat (see sidebar for details). As a working captain, he wanted a larger boat to fish more days and keep his customers comfortable when seas were choppy, but after 10 years he had his Sailfish 2360 nearly paid off. Take on a new boat payment, or reconfigure his current boat to open up space and handle seas better? Enter the Seakeeper.

"We sea trialed the Seakeeper at the Miami Boat Show and I was amazed. It turned that boat into a new boat."

The Seakeeper stabilizes the boat in rough conditions, and helps the boat in running. "I always had a hard time trimming, because of the side-to-side rock and the boat getting pushed by the wind," Ryan says. "I could never get the boat to max at

the sweet spot for fuel efficiency, where it's supposed to run at 30 MPH. Now that boat just wants to run straight, and you're not feeling the side-to-side motion and I'm able to run it where it needs to be with good fuel economy."

When you're fishing in a confused sea, with waves from seven different directions, your boat stays steady, he says. When you turn back around and go up a wave, you're still going to go up that wave, but not rock side to side on it. The Seakeeper doesn't arrest the pitch of the boat—that up and down motion created by waves, but it stills the side-to-side rolling.

Aside from the handling and the ride, how does the Seakeeper improve fishability? For live baiting along bottom, he not only gets a more stable platform to fish from, but the baits—and weights—hold





Landing a kingfish on the drift is a lot easier for this young angler—and everyone else—when the boat's more stable as the Seakeeper eliminates roll.

**"When we were done I wasn't all beat up. It's a whole new experience in fishing."**

better on the bottom for a more natural, less distracting presentation—much less bouncing of them on bottom. Topside, because the rods are steadier, it also helps anglers connect better with hookups.

"I also do a lot of power drifting for sailfish and wahoo, especially in the winter, and it lets me do that way more easily, and more

effectively. It's even to the point where if it's too rough to troll, I can power drift with the Seakeeper going. That right there adds to my fishing abilities," Ryan says.

For sailfishing, the increased stability will help Capt. Ryan kite fishing. As a one-man crew, he won't need to spend as much time adjusting lines to keep baits on the water

for the best presentation, as the Seakeeper will do a lot of that work automatically, "especially in the winter, when it can be nasty," Ryan adds. Once he gets the kites up and baits in, his hands will be free for other tasks. "Especially when fish are skittish, if those baits aren't right, the sailfish and tuna know it. The tournament guys are going to be checking this out pretty intensely."

Yellowtail and other reef fishing is a big part of Ryan's routine in the spring and summer, and what many visitors go to the Keys to experience. "A lot of my clients really enjoy yellowtail snapper fishing," he said. "Prior to the Seakeeper a lot of clients would get seasick when I set the hook, especially younger kids from the rock-and-roll motion of the boat. Add in an ugly, wind-against-tide, confused sea and 95-degree summer heat and you have the perfect storm for a client getting ill feelings. New clients would spend more time trying to find their sea legs than they did fishing,

and trying to keep from getting sick."

The Seakeeper changed the game for anchor fishing, he says. "The waves literally go around the boat. There is no rock and roll motion. Once the hook is set the boat sits steadily. I have to remind people we are fishing on the ocean and they should be ready for anything, because the Seakeeper makes you feel like you are fishing on a dock in the middle of the ocean. Also, I have people with really bad knees and backs fishing at anchor in 4-foot confused seas, walking with no problem."

Capt. Ryan did a lot of testing at anchor on his own to measure the Seakeeper's battery draw. "During testing I would sit on anchor for as long as 4 hours simulating a half day yellowtail trip with the Seakeeper, my Hooker Electric Pump, and all my electronics running. Zero issues. Everything was good, no problems. Even before Seakeeper I always kept my batteries on while at anchor because of the Hooker bait pump. At the end of the day I plug in and recharge, business as usual. Everything is all good with anchoring with Seakeeper."

A Seakeeper, as they say, won't cure a hangover. But on 2- to 4-foot wave days,

says Capt. Ryan, with an easterly wind, people who take the proper precautions not to drink the night before, or maybe to take some Dramamine if they're so inclined, and don't eat a greasy breakfast are "going to be just fine. The better, safer ride also opens up offshore fishing to people who had gravitated to backcountry fishing for the calmer waters. They're able to make it offshore now."

You only have so many days to fish. The

innovations keep coming to make those days better and more efficient. Count the Seakeeper among them. While it's still relatively new, and not many people know much about its performance other than perhaps watching videos, in a few years the Seakeeper will be accepted as an innovation that brought more people safely into the joys of boating and fishing. If you get a chance, try out the ride. I bet you'll be amazed. FS

## Seakeeper Specs and Tech



On his Sailfish 2360 (above), Capt. Ryan installed the Seakeeper 2 unit in his console (above right). Inset, touch screen panel on dash gives continuous information on the Seakeeper's angle of roll prevention.

**T**he Seakeeper 2 stabilization unit is the smallest Seakeeper yet, designed to eliminate up to 95 percent of boat roll on 27- to 32-foot vessels. The Seakeeper 2 is 25 percent lighter (414 lbs.) and 22 percent smaller (24.8" L x 25.5" W x 20" H) than the next smallest model.

To stabilize the boat against roll, Seakeeper's steel flywheel spins at speeds up to 9,700 RPM enclosed in a self-contained vacuum using minimal power. When the boat rolls, the gyro tilts fore and aft, producing a powerful gyroscopic torque to port and starboard that counteracts the boat roll.

Spinning the flywheel in a vacuum allows the Seakeeper to spin the flywheel three

times faster, cut its weight by two-thirds and halve the power requirements. It also isolates the critical components of the Seakeeper and protects them from harsh marine conditions. The patented cooling system removes heat from within the enclosure and dissipates it through a glycol/seawater combination. Active controls adapt automatically to changing sea conditions, so there's no need for the captain to adjust any settings.

The Seakeeper 2 will run exclusively on 12-volt DC power and cost \$22,700. The unit's small size allows it to be installed virtually anywhere on the vessel. The unit will utilize the newly designed touch screen control panel with an intuitive

user interface and allow users to capture real-time performance information.

Installation is handled through Seakeeper's dealer network, says Kelsey Albina of Seakeeper. "Approximately 70 to 75 percent of our installations happen at the OEM level on new builds. The other 25 to 30 percent are done by Seakeeper-approved and trained dealers. Capt. Ryan's installation was done through TRI SEA Stabilizers (Tim Nicoles, (305) 680-9499), who is one of our elite dealers."

Albina says that it is difficult to put a price on installation, because it depends on the vessel and the work involved. "If there's already space and no fiberglass needs to be cut, it can be very simple," Albina says.

## Seakeeper at SeaVee

**"A**t SeaVee, we haven't had a Seakeeper installed on a 29 yet," said John Caballero, Marketing Director at SeaVee Boats, "though we have done many on our boats 32-foot and up, on the 34, 37 and 39. Maybe for the smaller boats, it's because it's an economy of scale concern, because, as a percentage of the total cost of the boat it becomes significant. Seakeeper knows that and they are determined to mainline this technology on as many boat platforms as possible. They've also done a great job of supporting their product and collaborating with us. The interesting thing is, the smaller the platform of the boat, the more you stand to benefit with a Seakeeper."

"For the bigger boats, the customers absolutely love them. The upside of a Seakeeper install on a bigger boat is that you have a lot more real estate to work with and the Seakeeper doesn't take so much room on the boat overall. Also, on a big boat, the Seakeeper is a much smaller percentage of the overall cost. These customers for bigger boats are also usually quite experienced with ocean conditions—maybe this will be their third, or fourth or fifth boat—so they know what to expect out there and they are saying at this stage, let's get that Seakeeper in there and avoid the rough water and make the time on the water the best it can be."

Caballero revealed to us that SeaVee's new flagship 40-plus footer, now in development, will feature the Seakeeper as standard equipment. That new SeaVee center console will make its public debut at the 2020 Miami International Boat Show.



## Ocean Pointe Suites

Ocean Pointe Suites might suit your purposes if you're visiting Key Largo, Tavernier or Islamorada. Ocean Pointe Suites is a condo-hotel and suites are rented by the management. One- and two-bedroom fully-equipped suites are available.

- All suites have full kitchens, living/dining room, and private balconies
  - Located on a 60-acre private ocean-front sanctuary with sandy beach
  - Deep water marina, on-site boat ramp, ample boat trailer parking
- Ocean Pointe Suites is located just off A1A at 500 Burton Dr., Tavernier. The phone is (305) 853-3000. The website is: [www.providentresorts.com/ocean-pointe-suites/](http://www.providentresorts.com/ocean-pointe-suites/)