

# TROLLING IN 4WD vs 2WD



*Jeff Schwartz with a nice hatchery Chinook at Buoy 10.*

**The use of electric, bow-mounted trolling motors with wireless controls and autopilot in conjunction with a gas kicker motor is truly a game changer for west coast fishing applications.**

**D**irectional control when trolling or backtrolling in windy conditions has always been challenging. In fact, even when it's not windy, I've always been reluctant to let go of the kicker motor handle. It seems that when backtrolling or forward trolling, letting go of the kicker handle, even for a few seconds, sometimes results in losing your trolling line, or your course, your mind, and sometimes results in your gear momentarily not fishing as you intend. For most of my life, problems like these resulted in kicker motor slavery,

for to let go of the kicker motor even just to plug cut a herring, bait a hook with an egg cluster, tie a knot or any of the things that are frequently required during a day's fishing would disrupt effective fishing. In a matter of seconds, the boat would be off course, the gear not fishing effectively, and frustration would build. Stopping fishing to re-bait, check gear, tie a knot or whatever takes you out of the game for a period of time.

One way to overcome these problems is to use autopilot systems for gas-powered

kicker motors such as the Garmin TR-1. However, despite considerable improvement in control, TR-1 users are still somewhat handicapped. The problem is that the gas-powered kicker motor is in the back of the boat. Wind typically affects the bow most, and motors mounted in the back of the boat have a difficult time compensating for wind affecting the direction of the bow. In light wind, it's no big deal. However, if winds get much above 10 knots, especially if there are gusts, you will probably experience great difficulty trying to control

the boat with a stern-mounted motor, even if it does have a TR-1 system.

In 2013, I fished with my friend Dr. Francis Estalilla, MD at the popular Buoy 10 fishery. He'd recently installed a Minn Kota Riptide ST-80 electric, wirelessly controlled, bow-mounted electric trolling motor with iPilot to use in conjunction with his stern-mounted gas kicker. Conditions were not all that great that day, with sustained winds of maybe eight or 10 knots with gusts to maybe 15. I thought it was going to be a challenging day of open water trolling, but with the gas kicker/bow-mounted electric combo, Francis fished hands-free for virtually the entire day. He talked; he joked; he baited hooks and untangled lines, and even netted fish, all while the boat continued tracking along the path onto which he'd pointed it. I had never seen anyone in an open sled in conditions such as we faced be so free from the gas kicker motor. He really only touched it to put it in gear, adjust initial speed, and deploy or stow it at the beginning or end of a trolling run. I knew halfway through the day that I'd be buying a bow-mounted trolling motor before the next season. Francis summed up his experience nicely:

"I ran the kicker-based TR-1 autopilot for five seasons and I now own a Minn Kota Riptide ST-80 with iPilot. I use the kicker for thrust and steer with the electric trolling motor. The difference in precise, automated trolling is like night and day. The electric bow-mount autopilot platform is far superior and so much more versatile. There's no turning back now."

The use of electric, bow-mounted trolling motors with wireless controls and autopilot in conjunction with a gas kicker motor (referred to as "the system" going

forward) is truly a game changer for west coast fishing applications. This system provides the ultimate solution for boat control in virtually all fishable conditions. With primary thrust provided by the gas-powered kicker at the stern, and directional control and fine tuning of speed provided by the bow-mounted electric motor at the bow, it's like *trolling in 4WD*. I can't imagine being without this system for open water trolling in my sled. I never want to be a slave to the kicker motor again, and now I don't have to be.

### How It Works

With the system, the majority of thrust is provided by the gas kicker. Directional control and fine tuning of speed is accomplished with the bow-mounted electric.

Let's say I'm going to troll with the current from the Megler-Astoria bridge towards the Blind Channel on an incoming tide during the popular Buoy 10 fishery. Once I get to the point at which I want to begin, I'll shut off the main motor, deploy the kicker, point it straight ahead in the direction I want to troll, and put it in gear. I'll then deploy the bow-mounted electric (or have someone do it for me while I'm taking care of the kicker), turn it on with the wireless remote I wear around my neck, point the electric in the direction I want to go by pressing the appropriate directional arrow on the remote, and then the boat will proceed on that heading unless I make changes. I'll then adjust speed with the wireless remote to either reach the speed over ground I want, or the line angle I'm looking for. The electric motor has its own GPS and autopilot and will stay on the heading at which I pointed it. Once the fishing gear is deployed, I usually don't

need to ever touch the kicker again, unless it's to put it in neutral while fighting a fish, or when stowing it to move to a new spot. I'm free to cut bait, bait hooks, enjoy the scenery, joke with my companions, pour a cup of coffee, even net fish (yes, you can net salmon and continue trolling without having to worry about the boat drifting drastically off course). During the troll, I can make directional or speed changes with the wireless remote very easily by simply pushing a button. I often pick a landmark or point in space way in front of the boat, then simply turn the electric motor to point at the spot and the boat continues on that heading. I pretty much always use the autopilot (the Standard autopilot mode—more on this later) which will keep the boat on a particular heading, and I sometimes use the cruise control feature to maintain a consistent speed over ground or line angle.

### Equipment Considerations

I've used three different systems over the past few years. The first system was on a Fish-Rite sled and consisted of a Honda BF-8 gas-powered kicker motor, a Minn Kota Riptide ST-80 saltwater-rated, bow-mounted electric motor with their iPilot wireless remote, a Leelock Magnum Skeg, a Leelock MK-01 mount for the electric motor (which dropped right into my Leelock Quick Change Base), two Odyssey 31M-PC2150ST-M batteries (the Riptide ST-80 is a 24 volt system, hence the two 12-volt, deep-cycle batteries), and a NOCO GEN2 onboard battery charger.

The second system was the same as the first, except I installed a Minn Kota Riptide Ulterra 80 with a 60-inch shaft, iPilot, and Bluetooth, and I changed the

*It's great to not be a slave to the kicker motor. The author's Chinook has a Yamaha T9.9 kicker and Minn Kota Terrova 80 with iPilot Link. Kim Krumm image.*





*Minn Kota's MK 220PC smart charger will re-charge and maintain your batteries. Just plug in and forget it.*



*The Minn Kota iPilot Link remote control has both a touch screen and buttons. You should familiarize yourself thoroughly with its operation before participating in crowded fisheries. Kim Krumm image.*

gas kicker motor to a Mercury 9.9 Pro Kicker. The Ulterra featured automatic stow-and-deploy capability, activated by the remote control. The Ulterra provided both advantages and disadvantages—more on this later.

The third system is on my current boat: A Rogue Jet Boatworks Chinook 22 XXL—a 22-foot open sled. On this boat I put a Minn Kota Riptide Terrova 80, 72-inch shaft, with iPilot Link and Bluetooth. The iPilot Link remote allows you to slave the Terrova to Humminbird fish finders assuming you're using Humminbird's LakeMaster charts. This allows you to do things like have the boat troll or track along a specific contour line on the LakeMaster chart—something the bass guys would love. It would also be helpful in some of our big water trolling scenarios, but its true value is dependent upon the accuracy of the LakeMaster charts. I mounted a second chartplotter/fish finder in the boat to take advantage of these features—a Humminbird HELIX 9 CHIRP SI GPS G2N. As in the above two systems, I added a Leelock Magnum Skeg to the electric trolling motor. For charging the electric trolling motor's batteries, I had a Minn Kota MK-220 PC 2-bank, 10-amp charger installed, as well as a Trollbridge24 12-to-24-Volt Battery Charger/Combiner to charge the trolling motor batteries when I'm running my main motor. The batteries for the electric trolling motor are two Odyssey 31M-PC2150ST-M batteries. I highly recommend getting a Trollbridge24 as part of your system. Every little bit of amperage you can put back into your trolling motor batteries during the day lessens the depth of discharge and may prevent you from running out of juice. The gas kicker is a Yamaha T-9.9. To mount the Terrova, I used the Fish Fighter Products Quick Mount System. Like the Leelock system mentioned previously, this allows you to easily remove the electric trolling motor when it's not needed, or to swap out the electric trolling motor for an anchor nest if your boat is too small to mount both an anchor nest and an electric trolling motor on the bow. Both the Leelock and Fish Fighter Products mounts are functional, and both allow you to install a lock to help prevent theft of the electric trolling motor.

As you can see, I've had experience with a few different systems over the past four and a half years. Here are some thoughts on key elements and use of the system, as they are important.

Since the primary thrust for this system comes from the gas kicker, I tighten up the steering friction on the gas kicker so that I can put the motor pointing straight

and it will stay that way. I almost never have to steer with the kicker once the bow-mounted electric is deployed. In fact, I push the tiller handle straight up in the air, out of my way. I also tighten the throttle friction on the gas kicker so the throttle stays where I put it.

Regarding the bow-mounted electric, it is critical that it have wireless capability—that's what makes the whole experience a relatively hands-free gig. Both the iPilot and the iPilot Link wireless remote controls allow you to control the electric motor from any place on the boat. I wear the remote control on a lanyard around my neck. Regarding which to choose—iPilot or iPilot link—it depends on what you fish for most. For bass and walleye guys, the iPilot Link system provides some advantages, IF you invest in a compatible Humminbird chartplotter/fish finder and IF you use Humminbird's LakeMaster charts. If you don't plan on using a Humminbird chartplotter/fish finder, there is no point in spending the extra money for iPilot Link. For the Salmon/Steelhead crowd, iPilot is what I'd suggest. Additionally, the bow-mounted electric motor should be saltwater rated if you're going to fish brackish or saltwater. Finally, I recommend you get a Bluetooth version of whatever bow-mounted electric motor you choose. This will aid in updating the motor's software (which isn't necessary very often) with your smartphone and will allow you to use your smartphone as a backup remote control if you've downloaded the Minn Kota app.

The Leelock Magnum Skeg provides an incredible improvement in directional control due to its surface area being over ten times that of the electric trolling motor's factory skeg. It makes the electric trolling motor act like a powered rudder or bow thruster on the bow of the boat. It makes directional changes nearly immediate, and it counteracts the effect of crosswinds. An unexpected benefit of the Magnum Skeg is significantly increased longevity of the 12-volt batteries. I'd guess I get nearly twice as much battery life using the Magnum Skeg as I did before I installed it. The motor simply doesn't have to work as hard to maintain a course (especially in windy conditions) if it has a Magnum Skeg installed. I consider the Magnum Skeg absolutely vital to this system—without it, you might be trolling in 4WD, but with bald front tires! With the Magnum Skeg, I sometimes find myself in situations where I don't even need thrust from the bow-mount to maintain directional control; in such situations I sometimes disable the bow mount's propeller with the wireless

remote and just steer with the bow-mount.

For most people, having the ability to remove the electric trolling motor is desirable. For instance, if you know you'll only be fishing on anchor, you might want to remove the electric trolling motor to clean up the bow area of your boat. If your boat is small and the bow area doesn't have room to mount both an electric trolling motor and an anchor nest, the aforementioned LeeLock MK-01 combined with their Quick Change Base, or the Fish Fighter Products Quick Mount System, are great ways to go. Both allow you to swap out the anchor nest for a bow-mounted electric motor, and vice versa.

Regarding charging systems for the trolling motor batteries, it is important to re-charge them as soon as possible after use to ensure longevity. Nothing makes this easier than an onboard charger. I've used both the NOCO GEN2 and the Minn Kota MK-220 PC chargers. Both have performed flawlessly, and after four years of use, my original Odyssey batteries performed pretty much as they did the day I bought them. Be sure to buy a charger with the correct number of banks, and also consider the amps. I've found a 10-amp-per-bank charger can charge my batteries overnight, even after a 12-hour fishing day. Less amps per bank might not do the trick. I also advise strongly that you buy a "smart" charger, like the two mentioned above. They will not cook your batteries; less sophisticated chargers might. With the two chargers mentioned above, when I get home, I simply plug them in and forget about it. My batteries stay perfectly charged and maintained, and their lifespan is probably significantly enhanced.

Though I like to plug the charger in every night, I forgot to do so once. As a result, I fished two full days at Buoy 10—roughly 18 hours—on a single charge without running out of juice. I attribute this to having great batteries (the Odysseys have been stellar) and taking good care of the batteries. With the one exception I just described, I always plug them in and leave them plugged in when I'm not fishing. The onboard charger keeps them optimally charged—and I can leave the charger plugged in indefinitely. While I'm talking about plugging in the charger, I'll mention that it's a good idea to purchase an inexpensive, 30-amp RV power adaptor so that if you happen to be staying at a campground that has 30-amp RV power you can still plug in the charger at night. Take a heavy duty, 12-gauge extension cord, too.

It's important to note that to install a system such as this you'll need a space for

the deep cycle batteries. I used the fish box in the bow of my Fish-Rite sled to mount the batteries (I used kill bags to store fish). In the Rogue Jet Boatworks Chinook, I use the forward storage compartment to house the batteries. Bear in mind that depending on brand, the deep cycle batteries will weigh roughly 70 pounds each, give or take. Additionally, larger boats, especially those with hard tops, might need a three-battery, 36-volt system, a 3-bank charger and a larger bow-mounted electric trolling motor in order to have enough power to move the bigger boat. That said, I've seen open sleds as long as 25 feet do just fine with the 24-volt Riptide Ulterra 80 or Terrova 80.

Regarding batteries, I recommend buying the best you can afford, and getting at least group 27 deep-cycle batteries. Absorbent Glass Matt (AGM) chemistry is the preferred choice because you can mount them right side up, on their sides, whatever is necessary for the space you have, because AGM batteries won't spill. AGM batteries also withstand deep discharge better than flooded lead acid batteries, and generally have longer lives assuming reasonable care. You'll never have to top off the fluid in them as they are maintenance free. They are very impact resistant and tend to charge faster after discharge than flooded lead acid batteries. AGM batteries generally cost more than flooded lead acid batteries, but I think they're worth the extra money. I'm not saying a pair of \$120 flooded lead acid batteries won't work; they will. They probably won't last as long, though, when used for an electric trolling motor. Somewhere in the future, Lithium batteries, being much lighter than flooded lead acid or AGM, may be the best solution, but in my opinion there are a lot of bugs to be worked out before Lithium becomes viable in this application. I have been using Odyssey 31M-PC2150ST-M Group 31 AGM batteries for five years. No problems whatsoever, and no perceptible loss of power.

Shaft length is another consideration. Most aluminum sleds in the 18- to 21-foot range will work well with a 60-inch shaft. Some larger boats, especially high-sided glass boats, might require a 72-inch shaft. You want a long enough shaft that in all fishable conditions, the electric motor's lower unit stays in the water. You can always shorten a longer shaft with the adjustable collar, but you can't make a shorter shaft longer. You should measure as best you can how long a shaft you think you'll need. If you have buddies with similar boats, find out what they're using. For my new Rogue Jet Chinook, I chose the 72-inch shaft. It is longer than I need most of the

time, but it will never be too short. It's always a good thing to have a little too much shaft, rather than too little! For you anglers with windshield boats, you'll also need to consider whether a given shaft length will fit in front of the windshield when stowed. Again, figure out where you'll mount the base, then measure how much space you have from there to the windshield.

## Applications

The system shines most brightly in typical forward-trolling situations. Whether using downriggers, lead or flat lining plugs or other lures, boat control is simply unbeatable. It is inarguably the best solution out there for superb control of your vessel, which guarantees that your gear is fishing most effectively for the longest period of time. I described a typical forward trolling situation earlier in this article. Though the system realizes its greatest value forward trolling, there are other west coast situations in which the system is of great value.

Vertical jigging is one such application. Imagine trying to keep your vessel oriented over a suspended school of black rockfish or a pinnacle in the salt chuck—a place on which it can be very difficult to anchor. The iPilot and IPilot Link systems have a feature called Spot-Lock, which is essentially a virtual anchor. When you find yourself over the structure or school, simply press the Spot-Lock button on the remote and the electric motor's GPS will attempt to keep itself on the selected coordinate. In mild current and wind, the electric will be enough to keep you over the spot. However, with heavy current and/or wind, I use the gas kicker in conjunction with the bow-mounted electric, so the electric doesn't have to use as much power to try to maintain its position. You can also use a feature called Spot-Lock Jog to move the boat in five-foot increments forward or backwards, left or right. Note that Spot-Lock uses the electric motor's GPS to try to keep the electric motor on the "spot." As such, the rest of the boat will swing around from wind or current. Because of this, you'll want to approach your spot from

downwind or down current, then engage Spot-Lock. Spot-Lock also works very well to vertically jig Kokanee, and when paired with a fish finding system such as the Garmin Panoptix, it's possible to keep track of the school and stay on top of it.

You may be wondering if you can use Spot-Lock for anchor fishing salmon or sturgeon. You can, but for anchor fishing rivers, unless the current is really mild and there is no wind, an actual anchor generally works better. Depending on current and wind, the boat will move around some (especially the back end of the boat), and the electric motor will attempt to compensate, but it doesn't keep the boat as stable as an actual anchor in heavy current plus wind. Second, the electric motor will use a lot of battery power trying to keep the boat on the spot, and you will probably have to use your gas kicker to help, too. Third,



*A Minn Kota Riptide ST 80 in a Leelock mounting system doing its job on a smoky morning in the Blind Channel.*

since the boat will move around more than when on a hard anchor, your baits may get dragged around some. It's not that big a deal for salmon and steelhead, but it's not good if sturgeon are the target as they don't like moving baits. With all this said, I have used Spot-Lock to fish slow moving places like the Harbor area of the lower Willamette, just to see if it would hold well enough to get sturgeon to bite. It did, but there was no wind at all that evening. If I'm going to fish on anchor, I generally use an actual anchor instead of Spot-Lock.

Spot-Lock has other uses, too. On more than one occasion I've stopped near a launch on the way in (out of traffic, of course), engaged Spot-Lock, and cleaned

my fish without having to worry about drifting in to shore or into the traffic lane. Similarly, you can motor away from a busy launch, engage Spot-Lock, and begin rigging gear and preparing for the day's fishing away from the congestion at the boat launch.

The system can also be employed in river backtrolling, backbouncing or hover fishing situations, either in conjunction with the gas kicker in heavy current, or by itself in milder current. In light-current situations such as the Garbage Hole on the Willamette in Oregon City, a gas kicker often has too much thrust to backtroll due to the slow current in late spring. The bow-mounted electric will allow you to backtroll areas like this more effectively than those who have only gas-powered kickers. I've enjoyed the pleasure of fishing this hole when all the gas-kicker-only crowd had

given up and moved downstream to where the Bulkhead used to be (more current down there). With a jumbo diver and bait of eggs, I was able to get my bait to the bottom of the Garbage Hole in very slow current, effectively backtrolling the area when no one else could. As with forward trolling, when backtrolling with the system, directional control is greatly improved since you essentially have a rudder and bow thruster at the bow of the boat, and because it's physically easier to turn the boat from applying force at the

bow, rather than at the stern. What's more, tracking is much truer with the bow-mount system in backtrolling situations—either in heavy or light current—you get more traction, less wobble, less getting pushed off your backtrolling line, and better bait or lure presentation as a result. It really is like being in 4WD. Virtually hands-free backtrolling; who'da thunk it?

The system also provides enhanced speed control whether forward trolling, backtrolling or backbouncing. To put this in perspective, kokanee are sometimes very particular about speed. I use my gas kicker for the primary thrust when forward trolling, and usually set it at idle when I start fishing. I then use the bow mount to fine

tune my speed. It is no problem with this system to troll .8 miles per hour, .9 miles per hour, 1.2 miles per hour, or whatever, as indicated by the speed read out on my fish finder or the remote. For higher trolling speeds I will increase the throttle on the gas kicker so I don't have to use as much battery power from the bow-mount system. In contrast, for ultra-slow trolling I might put the gas kicker in neutral and simply use the bow mount for both direction and speed. In some unusual situations, I've actually put the gas kicker in reverse, with the bow mount deployed to provide directional control. A specific situation in which this was necessary was at Buoy 10, downstream of the bridge, Washington side, beginning of the outgoing tide with a hard east wind. The surface current seemed to be going out faster than the water at depth, and the hard, east wind was making the boat go too fast for proper line angle. Other unusual situations find me disabling the bow mount prop, but still having the motor deployed to provide better tracking and steering. In this instance, the gas kicker provides all the thrust. I don't do this much, but at times when there is little wind and slow currents, this method provides all the traction I need.

Finally, since it's really easy to maneuver the boat with the system, I've found that with the iPilot or iPilot Link remote hanging around my neck, I usually use the bow-mounted electric rather than the kicker to maneuver the boat while playing fish. If I need to do this for say, a large chinook, I'll usually put the kicker in neutral use the iPilot/bow-mount to maneuver as necessary to play and net such a fish. For smaller fish, like coho, it's often possible to continue the troll and possibly double or triple up. Since the system is essentially hands free, I can concentrate on netting the fish and the boat will still be fishing effectively. I still have to look around for hazards or other boats, but by and large it is usually possible with silvers to continue trolling when a fish is on. It is possible, with this system, to actually spin the boat in place by turning the kicker motor one way, and the bow mount in the opposite direction. Talk about maneuverability!

## Safety Considerations

This system makes trolling so easy, especially with the Autopilot mode, that you are free to do pretty much anything you want once the system and gear are deployed. However, you still have to navigate. You must still keep a lookout for other boats and hazards on the water, and to make course adjustments as needed. You need



***If you have room on your bow to mount both an anchor nest and your electric trolling motor, do it. These are both mounted with Fish Fighter Products' Quick Mount system. If you don't have room for both, both Leelock's Quick Change Base and Fish Fighter Products Quick Mount System will allow you to swap out the anchor for the trolling motor, and vice versa.***

to familiarize yourself with the system and wireless remote so that these adjustments are second nature. This is especially important in crowded conditions sometimes experienced during a hot bite at the more popular fisheries.

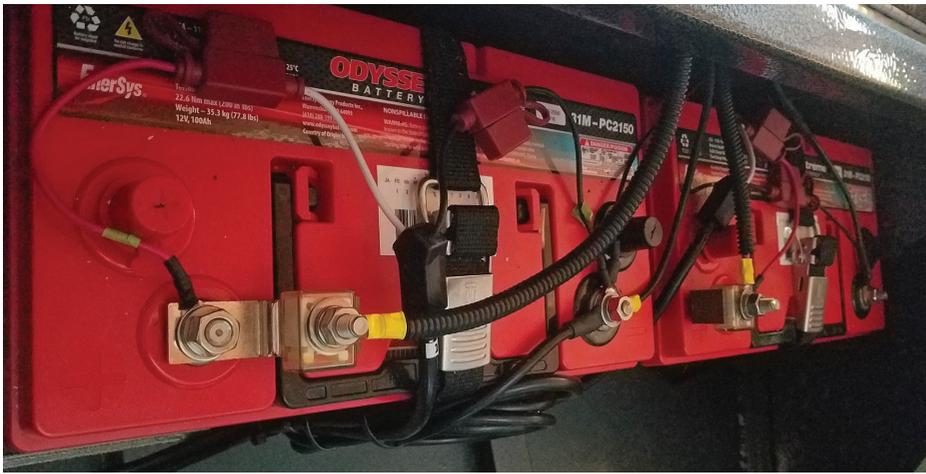
Regarding the autopilot, Minn Kota has two modes: Standard autopilot (formerly called Legacy autopilot), and Advanced autopilot. Standard autopilot puts you on a heading and keeps you on that heading. Wind may cause lateral drift, but you will remain on that heading. Advanced autopilot tries to send you to a specific point in space. If there is no wind, you'll track in a strait line to that point. However, if there is wind, you'll find the motor tries to compensate and will change your heading to try to reach that point in space. This can be problematic, especially in a crowd of boats. As such, I, and most others I know who use Minn Kotas, select the Standard autopilot mode.

Another potentially hazardous condition exists with regard to stowing the bow-mounted electric prior to making a run. First, be sure to disengage the bow-mount's prop so it isn't spinning when you or a crewmember pulls it out of the water (exception: the Ulterra stops the prop when you hit the stow button). Then stow the motor and ensure it is fully seated into its cradle. Otherwise, while bouncing through chop on your run, the motor could accidentally deploy, causing equipment damage (or worse). Trust me, you don't want this to

happen at 30 mph. This is not a fault of the bow-mount; it only happens through operator error. After you stow the motor, you can tighten the shaft collar near the lower unit. This will prevent accidental deployment even if the motor isn't fully seated in the cradle.

Having an anchor on board is an important safety best-practice for many fisheries. My current boat is big enough that I have both an anchor as well as the bow-mounted electric sitting on the bow of the boat, so I can quickly anchor if need be. If you have a smaller boat, you'll have to find a way to deploy an anchor, and if using the Fish Fighter Quick Mount System or the Leelock Quick Change Base system, in an emergency, you can swap out the bow-mount electric motor for your anchor system in about a minute. I encourage you to carry an anchor with you for safety reasons even though with a typical boat that is set up this way you already have a main motor, kicker motor and the bow mount.

Now about the Ulterra. The convenience of the auto-stow-and-deploy feature is revolutionary. No more 40-foot round trips to the bow and back to stow or deploy the motor. You can even drive the boat around from the dock, though I don't know how much range the remote has. For people with windshield boats it's not necessary to make numerous trips a day through the windshield to deploy or stow the bow mount, if using an Ulterra. Despite the conveniences, there is potential for problems,



*The author's new Odyssey Extreme 31M-PC2150 batteries mounted in the forward-most hatch of his Rogue Jet Boatworks Chinook 22 XXL.*



*Alicia Provost is all smiles with this Buoy 10 Chinook.*

the first of which could be a safety issue. You need to be aware of them.

If, by chance, you run out of battery power for the Ulterra, it may not stow or deploy completely. If this happens, you'll need a Phillips and a flat head screw driver and a copy of the instructions from your manual to manually stow it. You'll take off the right side plate, undo a screw inside, and follow a few other steps to manually stow the motor. This is not a speedy fix—it

will take a few minutes if you've never done it before. Hopefully, the conditions aren't too bad when this happens. Once manually stowed, you are done fishing with the Ulterra, not just for that day, but until you can get it to an authorized service center to get it reset. It could be that you'll be out of action for a few weeks. No Bueno. What's more, imagine you're trolling from the Shipwreck to the Bridge near Astoria on an outgoing tide. You're approaching

the Bridge, and decide to pull lines and go back to the top. You hit the stow button, and the bow mount comes up halfway, then stops. The bridge pylons seem to be racing at you; you have limited maneuverability as the bow mount lower unit and Magnum Skeg are still in the water steering your boat and you have to try to avoid the pylons in a four-knot current. No Bueno times dos.

I have also heard that some people have had problems with some Ulterra units when used in conjunction with a Trollbridge24. The gist of the problem is that the Trollbridge24 will only charge one of the bow mount's batteries when the bow mount is stowed, yet powered on and you're running your main motor from spot to spot. The charge will equalize between the two batteries fairly quickly once you deploy the Ulterra, so that's not that big a deal. If you turn off the Ulterra when you stow it, then the Trollbridge will charge both batteries when you're running your main motor. However, to turn the Ulterra on or off, you have to walk up to the Ulterra and press a button, which somewhat defeats the purpose of having an auto-stow-and-deploy motor. Despite these charging anomalies, you'll still get a full day's fishing out of the Ulterra's batteries if you have good batteries and maintain them well. Unlike the Ulterra, there are no charging issues between the Riptide Terrova (manual stow and deploy) and the Trollbridge24.

I imagine Minn Kota will come up with a fix for the Ulterra stow-and-deploy problem, but as of this writing, it ain't here yet. That said, I fished with an Ulterra for over two years. I never had a problem, but I was always very mindful to take good care of my batteries so that I never ran out of juice on the water. It boils down to personal preference whether you get an auto-stow-and-deploy or manual-stow-and-deploy unit, but you should keep the above paragraphs in mind when you're making your decision. When I sold the Fish-Rite, I let the Ulterra go with the boat. When I bought my Rogue Jet Chinook, I chose to go back to the manual-stow-and-deploy Riptide Terrova as I don't ever want to find myself out of action for a few weeks due to a stow or deploy problem, and I want the Trollbridge24 to charge both my batteries equally. Plus, a few more steps a day (to the bow and back) is not a bad thing!

Another consideration, not so much for safety but for peace of mind, is to carry an extra battery or two for the wireless remote control. In my experience, the batteries typically last for at least 100 hours of use, but you don't want to find you have a dead battery when you start fishing or

have one die in the middle of a trip. As a backup, if you have a Bluetooth version of the motor, it's a great idea to download the Minn Kota app onto your smartphone or tablet. This allows your smartphone or tablet to work as a remote control for the system in the event your batteries die or you pull a Francis and drop your iPilot remote overboard, and it also allows you to install updates to your trolling motor from your phone or tablet.

Finally, electric, bow-mounted motor systems with iPilot or iPilot Link autopilots are not cheap. In heavy chop and on rough roads it is possible the control head of the bow mount could bounce enough to smack into your gunwale. This could damage the control head. What's worse, if not fully stowed, the motor could accidentally deploy at speed, potentially causing damage to the unit, your boat, and possible injury to persons onboard. I prevented this on my previous boat by inserting the bow-mount shaft into a Folbe Advantage rod holder, and on my new boat with a RAM® Tough-Claw Trolling Motor Stabilizer. This prevents the possibility of the control head being damaged from impact and prevents accidental deployment. Of the two, I prefer the RAM solution. Note that while Minn Kota electric motors have a moveable collar that can prevent accidental deployment, the collar doesn't protect the control head from bouncing around. This collar does, however, allow you to set the depth at which the lower unit sits in the water. On a calm day it may not be necessary to send the lower unit the full length of the shaft into the water.

## Final Thoughts

I dropped into the top of the Bulkhead run on a cloudy, May 1<sup>st</sup> day with the intention of backtrolling eggs for springers. I deployed the bow-mount, started the kicker and put in in gear, adjusted speed and heading on the bow mount, then hit Spot-Lock. I let the diver and eggs out 75 feet behind the boat, put the rod in the holder, and disengaged Spot-Lock. I began sliding down the run, ever so slowly, adjusting speed occasionally. Most of the time my hands were in my pockets and I stood in the middle of my sled, watching the other boats around me. In time, I found myself in a group of five boats—four on one side, one on the other, and a hogline about 150 yards downstream. My rod buried, line ripping from the reel. I picked up the rod and shifted the gas-powered kicker into neutral. The bow mount, on autopilot, continued to provide enough thrust and direction that the boat slipped slowly downstream in a

straight line, away from the boats close by on either side of me. I played the fish as hard as I could with 17-pound fluorocarbon leader. The fish began to tire as I slid to within 50 yards of the hogline. I hit the propeller button on my remote, disengaging the bow mount's prop, grabbed my net, and led the 20-pound springer into the mesh. I set the fish on the floor and re-engaged the bow mount prop to motor away from the hogline. Once clear, I set the direction of the bow mount straight upstream, took a quick look around, and took care of the fish while I slowly slid downstream in a safe direction. Then I stowed the bow mount, turned off and tilted the kicker, and fired up the main to run back up and do it again. I can't tell you how difficult landing a fish in this situation, solo, might have been with just a gas-powered kicker in a tight quarters. It would have been a stressful goat rope. Much of the control, both of the fish and my boat, would have been compromised. With the bow mount, it was pleasant, enjoyable, safe, and I didn't screw up the other boats fishing around me.

The use of the system for west coast applications has been slow to evolve. It didn't start on the west coast; certainly, people in the Great Lakes have been employing such systems for a long time. The first place I heard of them being used consistently was in the Columbia River, in eastern Washington and Oregon. This revolutionary technique migrated down the mighty Columbia over the years and it's getting more common with each passing year to see them on sleds and even boats with hard tops in the popular Buoy 10 fishery at the mouth of the Columbia and in bays and saltwater all along the west coast.

The system is so effective—I'm astounded at how slowly this revolution has progressed, how few guide boats as well as private boats are using it, and how slowly the northwest boat-building industry has been to capitalize on it. Simply put, the use of these systems is a game changer for many west coast fisheries. I wouldn't dream of spending \$30- to \$80,000 on a sled without having one of these systems put on it. Once you experience the versatility, the precision, the hands-free trolling and backtrolling the system provides, you'll never want to go back to being a slave to your kicker motor. Trolling in 4WD is the way of the future!

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