

ADDING STABILIZERS



Seakeeper 5 gyro stabilizer reduces roll on 30' boats.

The pleasing motion of the ocean is a reason many people like to go boating. Excessive side-to-side roll while at rest, however, can be bothersome at the least and debilitating at worst. Yachts and boats over 50 feet have enjoyed the benefits of stabilizing systems for years, and now it's possible for owners of smaller-sized boats to reduce the most troubling motion with a Seakeeper gyro-stabilizing system.

Adding a Seakeeper gyro stabilizer to your vessel is actually relatively new technology—the company first launched its product in 2008. Since then more than 2,000 units have been installed on boats up to 220-feet long. Now, the Seakeeper



5 is available for boats 30- to 50-feet long. Haul-out may be the perfect time to research—and perhaps equip—your boat with a stabilizing system. “The new Seakeeper 5 provides an opportunity for at-rest stabilization for smaller boats that was never there before,” explains Andrew Semprevivo, Seakeeper’s vice president of sales and marketing. “The unit is about 30” x 30” and can be installed almost anywhere on the boat. It doesn’t even have to be mounted on the centerline.”

Gyroscopic physics is the force behind Seakeeper’s success. Imagine holding onto a spinning bicycle wheel—when it’s rotating and you’re standing still, everything is balanced. But hold the wheel and move your arms while twisting the wheel, and you’ll feel the gyroscopic forces of the wheel try to straighten itself out. An informational video on Seakeeper’s website explains the concept well. The Seakeeper gyro is effective while underway and at rest; however it does not replace the function of engine trim and trim tabs. “The flywheel inside the vacuum spins at a high rate of speed—10,700 rpm,” Semprevivo adds. “That maintains its orientation, and it’s only able to move fore and aft. All that torque that is exerted on the gimbal when the boat moves side to side reduces the roll 70 to 90 percent. It’s very simple.”

Other vessel-stabilizing systems such as fin stabilization work very well for larger boats in the 80-foot and larger range. Fin-stabilizing systems, however, are more complicated due to the through-hulls and multiple appendages and motors. Retrofitting a boat with fin stabilization is a major task that may require extensive out-of-the water procedures.

Equipping a boat with a Seakeeper gyro, however, can be accomplished in three weeks or less. When a customer inquires about a Seakeeper system, the first step is for a thorough boat inspection that results in a price quote. “We established a global network of what we call Certified Service and Installation Centers,” Semprevivo says. “These centers are in every major boating territory, along with two Seakeeper demo boats that

By DOUG THOMPSON

we invite customers to climb aboard. If they are interested, then that first step involves the inspection of the vessel and the space, and a turnkey full quotation that includes the installation, sea trial and commissioning.” Installation costs range from \$5,000 to \$35,000, because so much of the costs depend upon the space available on board and the prep work required.

“More and more builders are prepping boats for a gyro during the initial build,” Semprevivo adds. “If the boat is prepped and you just open up hatch, drop the gyro on a foundation, connect the electrical and plumbing, then it’s easy. Other times you have to move mechanical equipment and build a foundation, and that’s going to be more expensive.”

While the Seakeeper 5 is designed for boats up to 20 tons, the Seakeeper 9 stabilizes boats up to 35 tons or 50 to 65 feet. Larger models include the Seakeeper 16 (boats up to 70 tons/65-80 feet), the Seakeeper 26 (100 tons/80 to 100 feet) and the Seakeeper 35 (up to 140 tons/100 feet and greater). Multiple units can be fitted for larger vessels.

The five new units are not only more compact and

sophisticated, they’re also less expensive due to an investment in manufacturing efficiency. Retail prices for Seakeeper’s new models range from \$29,900 to \$197,900.

Maintenance of the major parts is minimal because the gyro and critical components like the motor and bearings are contained within a vacuum-encapsulated sphere. Inside the sphere the life expectancy is 8,000 to 12,000 hours, which could be up to 20 years of boating time. Outside the sphere there’s regular maintenance such as changing the zinc anodes for the heat exchanger every three to six months, and changing critical fluids every 1,000 hours.

“We say feeling is believing. For example, the owner of a major boat builder was out with me on a Seakeeper demo. We were in three-foot waves, we turned on the gyro and he said, ‘This is absolutely amazing. But I don’t think our customers use their boats in this kind of a sea condition,’” Semprevivo recalls. “Then the light went on and the builder said, ‘Wow, now they can enjoy our boats when the water is this rough. This will enable our customers to use the vessel and enjoy their passion more often.”



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