

Islander March 2007 – 10th anniversary edition

Technology “Backdate”

10 years of E3 Technology Updates. A Review.....

Part 1 - 1997 to 2002

In one of our first ever articles for the Islander, way back in May 1997, we were very excited to announce the launch of Metview, an innovative weather service.

“For the first time, the most comprehensive and unique collection of weather data is available from one source. It is delivered automatically, and you can look at it with an easy to use, colourful display that also animates the information in real time. You can simply point at a location and it will display the real weather conditions experienced within the last three hours. You can overlay each weather product such that you can combine the pressure chart with the cloud photograph”.

The really unique feature of Metview was that all yachts using the service also became weather data providers for the service themselves. All you needed to run Metview was a PC running Windows 95 connected to a dial up telephone line!! Sadly, our excitement was rather premature as the service was closed after a couple of years, and to date has never been replaced.

Early in 1998 we were announcing the first Refit and Repair Show to be held in Palma that October.

“ One of the best things that will happen to Palma this year is the new Refit & Repair Show at the start of October in and around the Club de Mar”.

The first Refit & Repair Show in 1998 was a resounding success, and the Show was run again in Palma in 1999 albeit with reduced attendance. However in our report of November 1999 on the new technology at the show..

1998 also saw the launch of the Inmarsat Mini M, which opened up satellite communications to yachts of any size, due to the smaller dome and lower cost.

“Last year (1997) KVH were the first in the market with their small Mini M satcom which was a stunning new product that provides, almost, worldwide voice, fax and data communications”.

Just two years later, in late 2001, we saw the first Inmarsat Fleet 77.....

“At Europort in mid-November we attended the launch, by Inmarsat, of the Inmarsat F77 Fleet. This is not quite the product we were all expecting. It is actually a replacement for the Inmarsat B but with no size or price benefit on equipment or airtime. The Thrane

& Thrane model, the Capsat Fleet77, has a 77cm dish inside an antenna dome of very nearly 1m in diameter.....

In August 1999, we had the GPS rollover issue...

“Midnight (UTC) on August 22nd, 1999 is when a number of GPS receivers will stop working correctly. There is a “rollover bug” in the software of a number of early GPS receivers. The units in question cover a wide range of manufacturers including the most popular makes Furuno, Phillips, Raytheon/Autohelm and Trimble”.

Unlike another more famous bug (see below), this bug really did manifest itself, but precautions were taken and most yachts were fine. Also in August 1999 Palma hosted the World Student Games (remember them?) - the Great Britain team celebrated a ten medal haul.

At the end of the year, century and millennium, we nervously awaited chaos and consternation as more and more scare stories appeared about the mysterious Millennium Bug. What a damp squib that turned out to be - nothing happened!

Before the turn of the century the GMDSS (Global Maritime Distress and Safety System) was introduced, as reported by us in December 1998. In the April 2001 we reported on the next new navigation system with the acronym AIS (Automatic Identification System).

“AIS (Automatic Identification System) for ships to become compulsory from 2002.

Like many of you, whom I hope may be reading this, I had never heard of AIS or Automatic Identification System until just recently, let alone that it was to become a compulsory fit from next year”.

We also saw the growth of electronic charts. The electronic chart industry started with some basic acronyms such as ARCS and incorporated words such as “Raster” and “Vector”. These have given birth to others such as ENC, ECDIS and S57 to list but a few. Since the birth of the electronic chart the technology has matured along with increased sophistication and complexity.

Iridium satellite communications came to life at the end of the 1990’s using a huge constellation of new geostationary satellites. This looked to become a serious competitor to Inmarsat. However in April 2000 Iridium suddenly died...

“Iridium LLC announced that it was terminating commercial service after 11:59 p.m. (EST-USA) March 17, 2000, and that it was beginning the process of liquidating its assets”.

But then in July 2001 Iridium rose phoenix-like from the ashes...

“... in December 2000, the US Military took a 5-year lease on the Iridium system with unlimited call time. They have placed a US\$72 million contract with Iridium, so their future financial security is potentially sound”.

Also in July 2001, and timed to coincide with the tennis from Wimbledon, Sky switched off the old Sky analogue service using the yellow cards and converted totally to digital.

We also had a new superfast PC processor launched by Dell in 2001 and we wondered where it was all going to go....

“PCs about to break the sound barrier, or are we only just off the blocks?”

Last week the new Dell 1.7Ghz PC caught my eye. Where are these PCs going? The 1Ghz barrier was only broken at the end of last year and we are already up to 1.7Ghz. Some years ago when the Intel 386 was launched there was a lot of press comment about it not being possible to exceed 33Mhz as there was no way of securing the radiation from the chip”.

This is still the standard speed of most new PCs today in 2007, thus there haven't been huge increases over the last 5 years.

2002 saw the launch of the first GPRS faster mobile phone data service. This area of technology has taken huge leaps and bounds forward in the last five years since 2002. We have jumped from GSM to GPRS to 3G to HSDPA and now we are preparing for HSUPA. In total this is an increase from 9.6Kbps to 7Mbps.....

Part 2, next month, will continue the review from 2002 to today.

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