

I rent a house for the summer in Orient, but usually only get out for long weekends. I have an 18-foot Mako center console that sits on a mooring. Last year I had problems with the battery and replaced it. But is there anyway I can keep the battery from discharging — or at least having to worry about it? — *MJK from New York City*

Just to ease your mind, there is something you can do even if you're not hooked up to shore power to ensure the battery stays fully charged and will run the bilge pump while you're away — as well as start the boat when you've made the trek out from da' city. Hook your battery to a solar charger.



PulseTech, a Texas company (800-580-7554; [www.pulstech.net](http://www.pulstech.net)), makes a two-watt and a five-watt version of their SolarPulse (SP) solar charger. What's neat about it is that it will not only keep your battery charged but reduce the size of the lead-sulfate crystals that form on battery plates, which allows the battery to stay as fresh and performance-ready after six months of inactivity as they were the day they were new. These folks have been making these charger/refreshers for a while — I've been

# ASK CAPT. GARY

By Capt. Gary P. Joyce

using one of their AC chargers for several years and will be mounting the solar charger on a boat we're rebuilding. Anyway ...

It's a snap to hook up. If you've got a space that isn't going to be walked upon or sat on — it's about 8.5 inches square and as thick as a magazine, you can place it there. The control module has to be visible (to see that it's on) and also has to be within about a foot of the battery. The panel itself can be as far as 17-feet away, and if you don't want to mount it permanently, you can just do it as a temporary mount and then stow it while you're using the boat. The two-amp MSRP is around \$99, the five-amp around \$179.

**Okay, I give up. What in the blankety-blank is a bat drive and what does it have to with boating?** — *MP from Pawcatuck*

So glad you asked. Well, first off it has

nothing to do with comic book heroes. The BAT (for Bayview Auxiliary Tug, so christened by its inventor Ronald Voegeli of Oak Harbor, Washington) is an auxiliary power unit that is an emergency get home unit in which a PTO (power take off; a hydraulic pump) unit running off your genset is attached to your prop shaft.

Voegeli sold the patent rights to Washington-based Wesmar in September 2007. They rechristened it an APU, auxiliary propulsion unit.

The idea isn't new. Vetus has offered a belt-drive hydraulic unit to drive your prop for a while. The difference with the Wesmar APU is that the entire drive is set up on the prop shaft. Should the main engine take a hike, the generator will power the hydraulic APU, which engages the propshaft via opposing crenelated (think: those gap-tooth-looking things on the top of castle walls) rings. When the APU is no longer required, the crenelations separate. The entire process can be controlled from the helm via a joystick for speed, forward and reverse. Turn a key, and you have control of your get-home engine.

Boaters who have these installed also use them to quietly putt away from the dock on early morning trips so as not to wake the neighbors. If you're interested in more info, contact Wesmar in Woodinville, WA; 425-481-2296; [www.wesmar.com](http://www.wesmar.com).

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