

# Above it All

## The AirBerth Boat Lift System

BY JOHN BARR

Having a vessel secured in a slip certainly has its advantages. When the urge hits and the weather cooperates, just go down to the harbor, and off you go for an exciting day on the water.

While there are many reasons to trailer your boat, the process of getting on the water is far more complicated. You hook up the boat and fight the traffic to the ramp. If the gods have smiled down on you the ramp will be clear, if not get in line. Then there's the concern of how far from the ramp will you have to park your rig and if there will be a spot for you at all. And that's only the

front half of the effort. At the end of the day you have to deal with the line at the ramp to get the boat back on the trailer and then you're back in traffic. So much for a relaxing day on the water.

In spite of that, there are still advantages over having a vessel in a slip. One is maintenance and another is the cost of slip fees. Trailerable boats can be hauled to your marine mechanic for servicing at less cost. Props and underwater fittings can be serviced without the expense of hauling out, and the same is true when maintaining the bottom. These are a few of the issues that promote trailering.

Would it not be great to have the best of both worlds? How about a

water born trailer that's maintenance free and keeps your vessel out of harms way, and is as convenient as having a vessel in a slip.

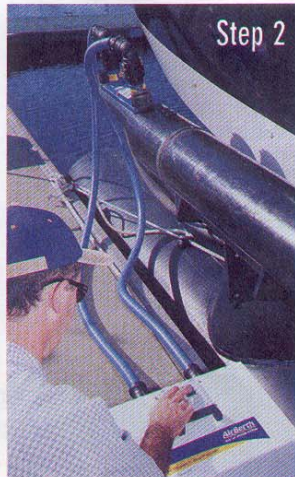
Over the years there have been attempts for such a system to either protect your vessel in the water. While some have worked well, others I have experienced are difficult to operate and require as much maintenance as your vessel if stored in the water.

### A Born Skeptic

I was somewhat skeptical when I was asked to test a new system from the Land Down Under. When I listened to the hype, my first thought



Drive the boat onto the submerged AirBerth and secure the positioning ropes to the boat.



Attach the blowers to the air control, which will commence the displacement of water from the primary floats.

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was that somebody had eaten a bad batch of "shrimps from the barby", but I wanted to see what was up.

To my surprise the **AirBerth Boat Lift System** is just what it was touted to be – it is easy to use, virtually maintenance-free and converts your slip into a water born trailer with of the advantages of a trailer and the convenience of a vessel in a slip.

### Different By Design

The AirBerth system is a boat lift that operates on the principle of buoyancy. Similar to some boat lift systems on the market, it utilizes buoyancy tubes to raise the vessel out of the water. But this is where the similarity ends. Most systems currently on the market are an adaptation of a hard or solid boat cradle that can be raised with buoyancy, or by utilizing a winch system to get the vessel out of the water. Because most manufacturers' choice of materials and method of lifting, maintenance is still a concern especially in salt or brackish water.

AirBerth has eliminated all but minor maintenance caused by in-water boat storage, both for the vessel and the boat lift as well.

The main cause of failures and high maintenance costs of many



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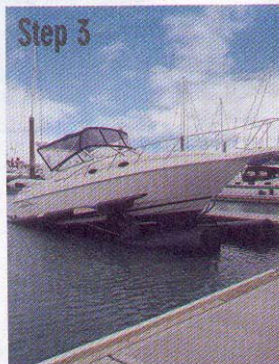
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Within minutes, the boat will center itself, as the AirBerth shapes the hull and completely lifts the boat above the water.

AirBerth has eliminated all but minor maintenance caused by in-water boat storage, both for the vessel and the boat lift as well.

boat lifts are due to the materials used in the construction, that are often unable to survive in a salt-water environment. Even some fresh waters have high chemical content that can significantly shorten the life of some lifts.

The AirBerth is different in that it is constructed of industrial high-density polyethylene plastic that has a known material life (50 years plus), and requires little (if any) maintenance, is impervious to most chemicals and acids and allows the lifts to be used in waters that would destroy other systems.

Industrial High Density Polyethylene Plastic (HDPE) is environmentally friendly and is one of the few plastics not made from harmful chemicals. It does not leech into the surrounding water, can be re-cycled, is UV stable, will not rot, rust, or swell and is not effected by electrolysis or osmosis. An added benefit, HDPE is non-stick and is a



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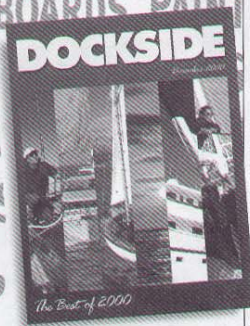
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## EQUIPMENT

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### Support Where You Need It

Most boat lift manufacturers support the load of the vessel on horizontal beams which in turn is supported on either side by attachment to buoyancy or flotation device. This method of support loads the beam some distance away from the point of buoyancy, creating stress between those two points. Airberth is different in that during operation, the rising front saddle is pushed down by the boat's keel. This process rotates the primary tubes (main buoyancy chamber) thereby shaping the saddle to conform to the hull shape of the vessel. As a result of the primary rotation the boat's weight is then supported on the pedestals, directly over the upward thrust of the buoyancy. The result is solid and safe compression loading for the boat lift and solid, shaped, support for the boat along the strongest parts of the hull, the keel, chine and transom.

The long, continuous berthing

guides assist the boat owner in entering and leaving the AirBerth. Once into the submerged AirBerth the bow is captured between the guides and is prevented from drifting due to side winds or current and will guide the boat correctly into position every time without marking.

### Automatic Positioning

Once into the lift, the skipper attaches the pre-set positioning ropes to the boat's rear cleats, connects the high volume, low pressure air blowers and turns them on which begins an automatic procedure as it rises. It will center the boat, slide the vessel backwards to tighten the positioning ropes, rotate both primary tubes to shape the support to suit the boat hull, raise the bow first (to keep the most stable part of the boat in the water until the boat lift stability takes over), and then raise and lift the stern of the boat gently out of the water.

Different from other lifts, AirBerth has designed a unique internal system within the primary tubes that ensures the stern of the boat will lower first with one simple set of controls for retrieval and launching.



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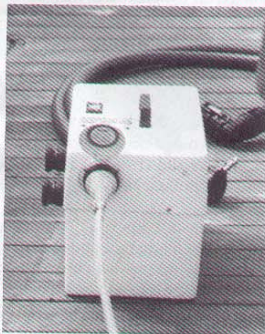
## Safety and Control

Most lifts only control air. If air leaks through a faulty seal, worn valve, leaking hose, or a puncture in a buoyancy chamber, the result will most likely be sinking or listing of the lift. Even a very slow air leak can be significant over a period of time.

AirBerth controls both the air and water which makes it safer as any air leak will have no effect. In order to go down air must escape and water must enter. AirBerth boat lifts are able to raise the water intake tubes above water level during storage preventing the boat lift from lowering. If water was able to enter for some reason, air is sealed and water cannot flood the primary tubes.

Another significant advantage, is during the cooler overnight temperatures the air inside the primary tubes contracts and draws more air into the primary tubes through the open water intake tubes. During the higher daytime temperatures, the internal air expands again, forcing any internal water (should there be any) out through the open water intake tube, a natural event that simply occurs due to the temperature differentiation between night and day.

*continued on p. 60* ▶



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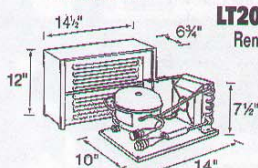
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## Bottom Line

Now you know why the AirBerth works and have a basic idea of how it operates, but does it really work? The Dockside Test Team travelled to the San Diego Yacht Club to test the operation of the AirBerth first hand. The vessel used lift we tested was a Bimini 306 Grady White equipped with twin outboards that weighted approximately 4,800 lbs.

Chip Nedeau, a representative of AirBerth, was our host. He explained the operation and began the launching procedure. In a matter of a little under two minutes the vessel was in the water and ready to be on its way. The operation was simple and quick. To retrieve, the vessel was positioned onto the lift using the positioning lines and the blower was plugged in to dockside power, the hoses were attached and the blowers turned on. Again, a very simple procedure that could be handled by anyone. Within less than five minutes the vessel was high and

dry. The AirBerth was a simple operation and proved virtually maintenance free. A feature that really caught our attention was the standard equipment hull wash down system. By simply connecting a hose to a convenient fitting located along the buoyancy tubes, you are connected to fresh water to wash down not only the hull but the drives as well, a unique system that cuts down on clean up time.

AirBerth Boat Lift Systems come in nine weight lifting models to lift from 3,500 lbs to 22,000 lbs and can accommodate vessels from 24 feet to 46 feet. They are designed to lift mono planing hulls, cruisers, ski boats, offshore boats and rigid hull inflatable boats (RIBs). At present the system can not accommodate catamarans, pontoon boats or keeled sailboats.

For more information on this remarkable departure for the traditional boat lift systems, contact:

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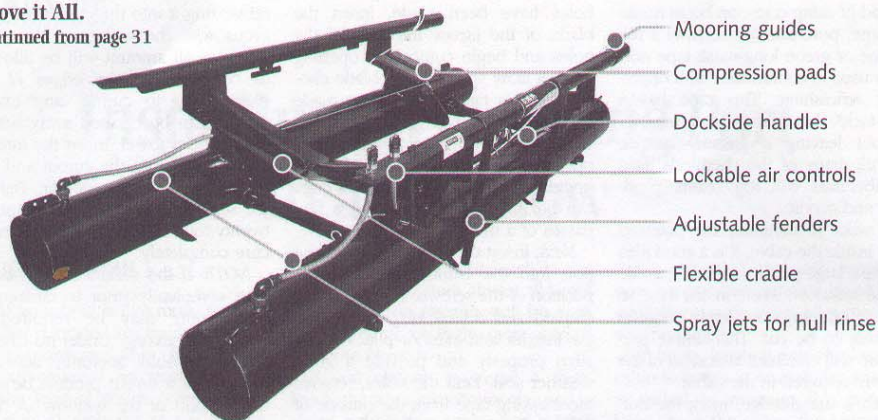
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Continued from page 31



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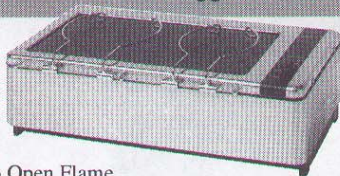
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