

The Plastimo collapsible water tank undergoes a drop test.

cover, which protects against abrasion from raw fiberglass in the bilge, where the tank is secured.

**On balance:** This tank is tough enough to be considered for permanent installation, and it's nice to be able to empty it, disconnect it, clean it, and hang it up at the end of the season. We'd buy it again.

**SEOLADAIR EASYSTOW INFLATABLE FENDER**

Reviewed July 2008

The Easystow was named Best Choice in the original PS review of inflatable fenders. The fender reviewed in the article was the 10-inch by 36-inch fender model FH1036 (currently \$109). We ordered and installed a larger model, Seoladair part number FH1060, the 10-inch by 60-inch heavy-duty fender (\$149). The fender has been in use as the test boat's primary fender, both in the slip and rafted up with other boats, since July 2008. That's 18 months of in-season use, plus a bunch of winter months deflated and

left in the covered boat.

**Good news:** This fender is light and easy to work with. It takes the place of two cylindrical or ball-type fenders. The blue material doesn't develop the gummy substance that affects poly-plastic fenders in hot weather that can stick to and mar a gelcoat. The valve arrangement is dirt-simple. You fold the rubber blow-tube the way you would a garden hose without a nozzle, and tuck it inside a fabric patch on the fender.

**Bad news:** We now have slight wear in the webbing loops that suspend the fender from a braided rope pendant. There is slight chafe on the outside surface of the tube that lies constantly against a wooden slip rail. The air in the fender expands in hot weather and makes it extra firm, and in cold weather it deflates a bit. We have found a happy medium and seldom make adjustments. You must make sure the folding valve is secure.

**On balance:** After three seasons of constant use, we think this fender exhibits very reasonable wear and tear, and look forward to using it for years to come. When the webbing loops get too frayed, we can flip the fender bottom-for-top and start over with the unused loops. This will also put the abraded side of the fender against our topsides and a fresh surface against the harsh wooden dock. Eventually, we may sew on new webbing loops to the roots of the old ones.

**GARMIN GPSMAP 545S**

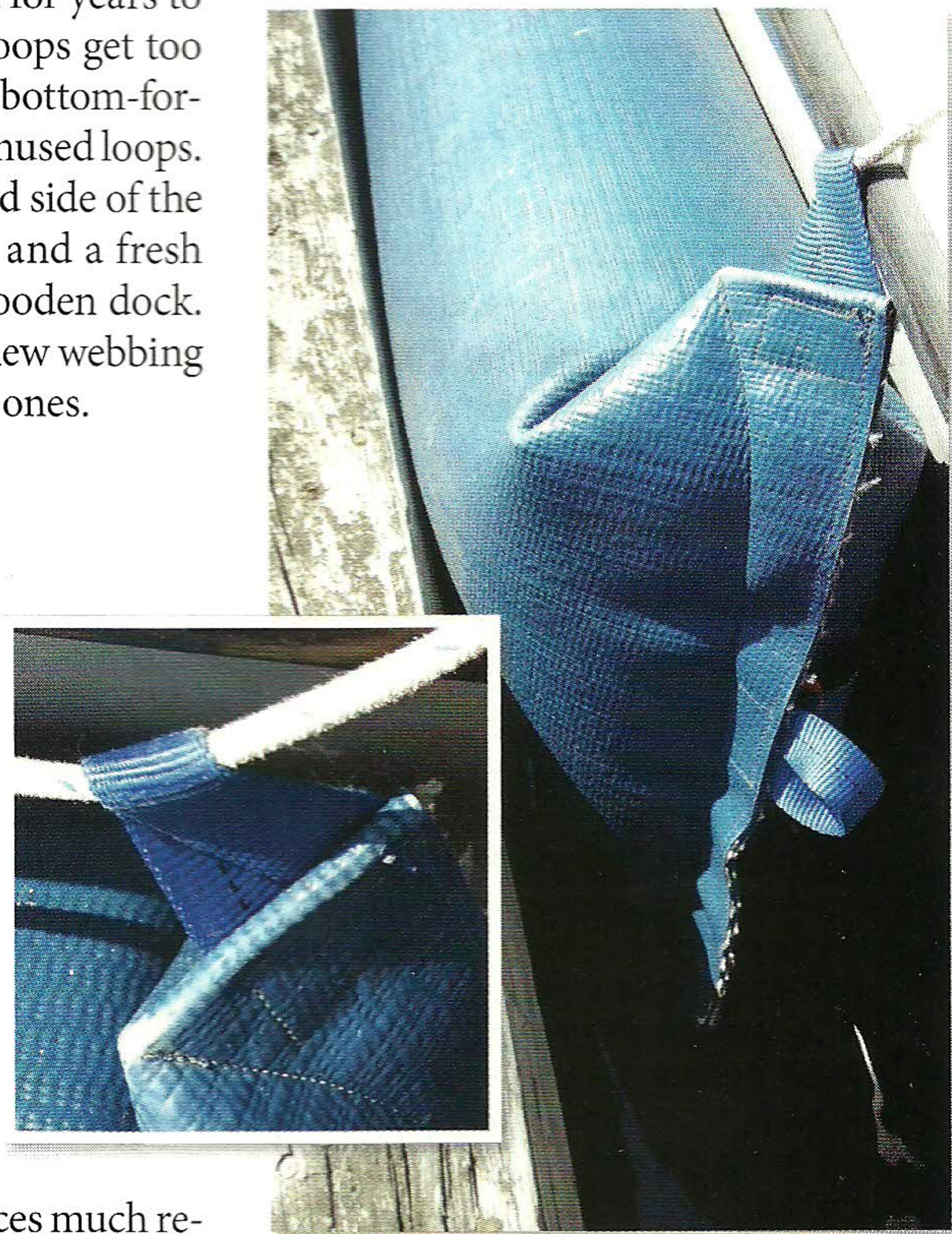
Reviewed October 2008

With new touchscreen technology, this small (5-inch screen), button-controlled chartplotter, reviewed only two years ago, will probably soon seem archaic. As of presstime, the 545s seems to have slipped from the front rank on Garmin's webpage, but is still listed on the website, and is widely available at prices much reduced from the one we paid.

Note that this is the chartplotter with the depthsounder option (thus the "S"). When testers installed ours, we needed to have a custom cable made to link an

Airmar through-hull depth/temp transducer, already installed, directly to the Garmin plotter/sounder, bypassing a black-box connection set up for a first-generation Furuno NavNet system. For this project, we got in touch with Gemeco, a subsidiary of Airmar located in Lake City, S.C. We sent Gemeco digital photos of the connections we had and the ones we needed, and the cable arrived in a couple of days. The whole setup has worked well for 2½ seasons.

**Good news:** This has been a rugged and reliable device in a boat that takes a fair amount of wave punishment. We mounted ours without the external antenna, and it has no trouble gaining and holding lock through a 1-inch composite-core cabintop. We have found the BlueChart vector cartography very accurate in our local (Long Island Sound) waters. As with any vector cartography, labels don't always appear where you expect them and change position at different zoom levels. There's always a correct position, but the user has to know



The Seoladair fender has been in steady use against a wooden dock and other boats, but it exhibits very little wear, even where it's hung from webbing loops.