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LAUNCHING THE ELECTRIC PADDLE

When cruising, I enjoy the freedom that comes with my inflatable dinghy and motor, and switching to an electric outboard seems like a good direction in which to head. Recently, my husband, Tom, and I had an opportunity to test out a new electric outboard called the EP Carry, from PropEle Electric Boat Motors.

Tom and I launched an 8-foot inflatable-keel Achilles dinghy into a harbor with a large protected mooring field and attached the lightweight EP Carry for a test run. EP stands for Electric Paddle; it's designed for ship-to-shore transportation, not as an expedition motor. From the start, I could see that it's clearly moving in a new direction with its long tiller arm that controls all the motor's functions. Steering from amidships, you raise and lower the motor with a tug or push on the arm, making it easy to beach or approach a shallow dock. Forward, reverse and throttle are operated by a dial on the end knob; the EP's intuitive to use, though without a little practice it's easy to inadvertently change direction and speed.

The motor pushed the dinghy at 3.5 to 4 knots over flat water and in the mooring field's wind and chop. It almost seemed to operate better with two of us to balance, so weight wasn't an issue. There's magic in starting from silence, without the intrusive rattle and fuel stink from a gasoline outboard.

However, the magic was disconcerting because there were no indicators to tell how or even if the motor was operating. According to the company, run time

depends on speed, with full throttle giving about one hour, and half-throttle about two hours. Since under normal use, users would rarely stick to one constant speed, this is a difficult gauge. For my testing purposes, I just used the motor like I would if it were my day-to-day engine, and actually got about 2½ hours out of it. PropEle's vice president, Linda Grez, assured me the company is listening to its customers, and plans to add a battery meter to show charge remaining, using indicator lights integrated into the battery cable. Those who already own the motor will be able to retrofit.

I like that the motor cover is made of high-impact ABS plastic with a UV protectant, and the maintenance-free nature of electric motors. At 21 pounds, it's light enough to stow in a locker rather than on the stern rail.

The separate battery comes with its own PFD and can be charged at night, either plugged into an AC power source or through an inverter to a boat's battery bank. The EP Carry goes for \$1,600, which includes motor, battery, fast charger, accessory carry bags and a lock for security. While there are other electric motors around, in my opinion, this is the first to be designed with the needs of cruising sailors in mind. For more information, visit the company's website (electricpaddle.com). — *Ann Hoffner*

The EP Carry electric outboard is lightweight, simple to use and compact enough to easily stow aboard most cruising boats.