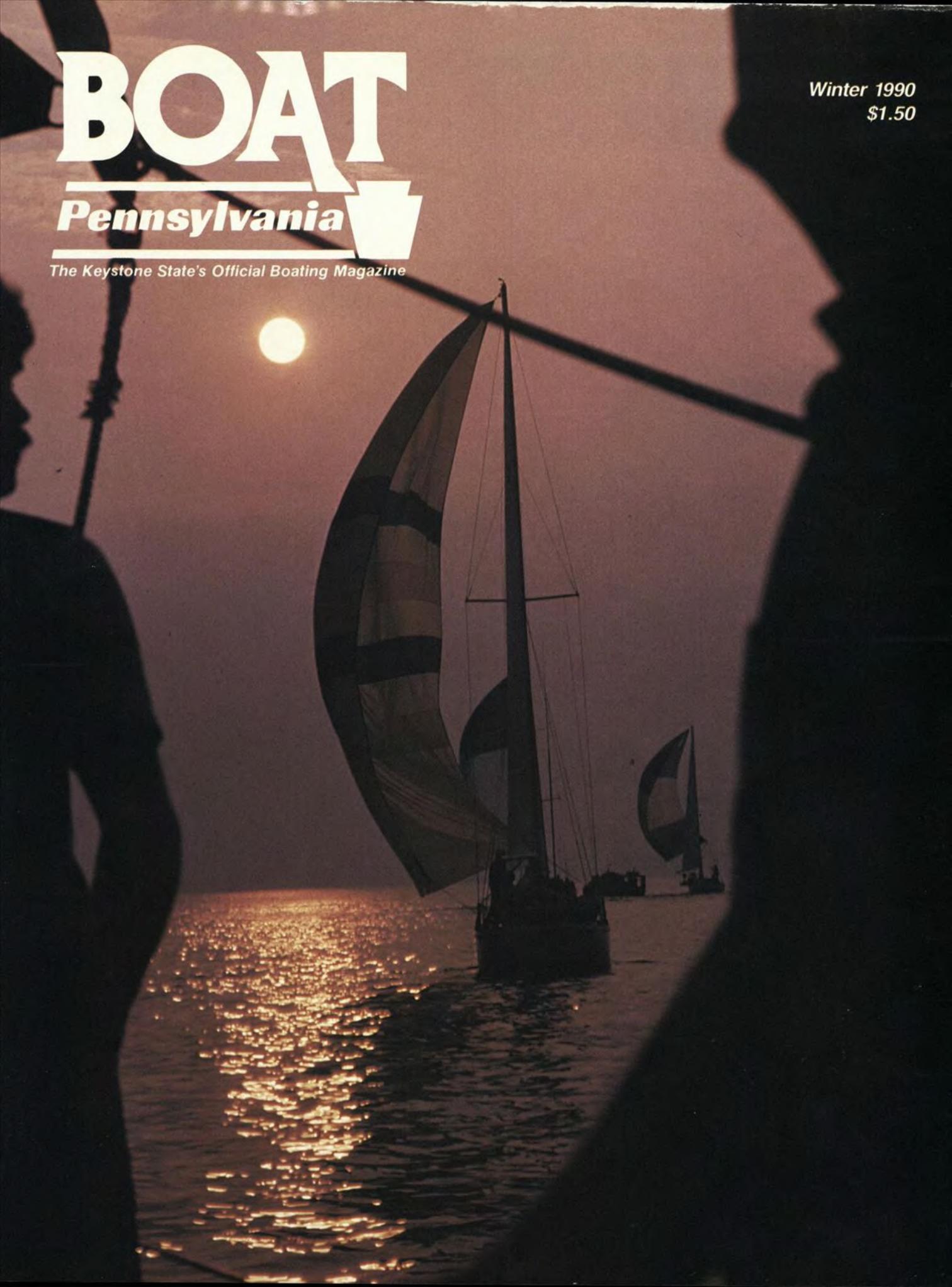


# BOAT

**Pennsylvania**

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# VIEWPOINT

## **Difficult Problems, Difficult Solutions**

I recently attended a conference of the National Association of Boating Law Administrators. At this meeting were representatives of the states, the U. S. Coast Guard and many volunteer organizations that are sincerely interested in the promotion of safe boating. The theme of this conference was "Difficult Problems—Difficult Solutions." It couldn't have been more to the point.

The Boating Safety Advisory Council reported on its study of the use of prop guards. A video tape of a stunt man being run over by a boat graphically demonstrated what happens when a prop guard is installed. The subject reported that it was like getting hit by a baseball bat.

Certainly this would be preferable to being hit by a prop, but I wonder about the efficacy of a prop guard requirement. Performance experienced a five percent decrease at the expense of a 25 percent increase in fuel consumption. Of course, you can't equate human suffering with fuel consumption, but of over 9,000 boats involved in accidents in 1988, only 48 accidents involved being hit by a prop or a boat. Is the added expense worth the potential safety improvement? People will still be hit by boats.

The issue of noise also took a major role in the conference. From the use of high-powered muscle boats to personal watercraft, the issue of noise is a nationwide problem. Some states are taking drastic action to control noise. Certain types of watercraft are being banned as the only enforceable solution. Personal watercraft are particularly subject to these types of discriminatory regulations.

The industry is being prodded to clean up its act, but manufacturers seem slow to react. Improvements are being made in noise levels, but not nearly fast enough. The industry must take the initiative not only to meet existing noise levels but to accelerate efforts to eliminate engine noise completely as an irritant.

A new noise testing procedure was presented to the organization. This test would eliminate many problems with the currently accepted testing method, which requires that boats be run at full throttle through a test course. The new test will be conducted at the dock. This new test will encourage enforcement agencies to become more aggressive in their noise testing. But the industry will have to hurry to engineer solutions to noise production before they are regulated out of existence by public pressure.

Mandatory education is also a topic of much discussion. Connecticut and Vermont are the latest states to require some form of education before one can operate a boat. The Connecticut law is perhaps the most stringent in the country. Its law requires that all operators of boats in excess of 25 hp take a course or pass an equivalency examination. Only persons who can show evidence of having a registered boat during the past five years are exempt. Connecticut officials estimate that it will cost up to \$4 million dollars to implement this system.

Is mandatory education the solution to the problems of increasing congestion on the waterways? Will safety improve as a result? Are boaters willing to bear the expense?

Personal flotation devices have proven themselves to be invaluable in saving lives. Since the inception of the requirement for carriage of PFDs was instituted, accident statistics have shown a dramatic decline. An even greater decline would be experienced if everyone were required to wear a PFD at all times.

Considering this, the cushion has recently received much attention. Many say that a cushion is useful, but if wearable PFDs were required, boaters would be more likely to wear them in dangerous situations and perhaps increase their chances of survival.

This sounds good, but what happens in the event that the wearable device is not worn when an accident occurs? A cushion is normally immediately available, but a wearable device is often kept under the seat or tucked in the boat's gunwales. Can a wearable device be thrown and grasped as easily as a PFD designed to be thrown? Certainly boaters have drowned in boats equipped only with cushions, but how many have been saved by the cushion and the accident never recorded?

There are many other problems facing agencies responsible for the protection of property, the safety of boaters and the enforcement of laws. Boating has grown at an unprecedented rate in recent years. The easy solutions are gone. The efforts of the industry and the regulatory agencies must now be directed toward the difficult problems that have difficult solutions—solutions we may not want to accept but ones that will be forced on us by circumstance and reality.



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## The covers

This issue's front cover, photographed by Paul Jenkins, shows a fleet of sailboats heading eastward into Lake Erie from Presque Isle Inlet. If cold-weather boating interests you, before you bundle up, check out the article on page 8. If paddling turns you on, you might find some new places to play on page 14. Are you a water skier? Do you want to get some *real* training? See page 18. To view a spectacle, turn to page 4, and to speculate a little, see page 28.

This issue's back cover shows Commission boating education specialist Dan Martin plying the waters of the Susquehanna River near Harrisburg. Art Michaels took the picture.



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