

Gilbert Park compares two different celestial navigation books and Ali Wood tries 'snap-on' shades and a Lomo tow-float

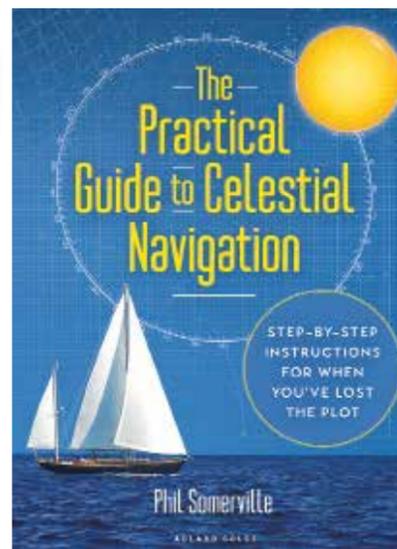
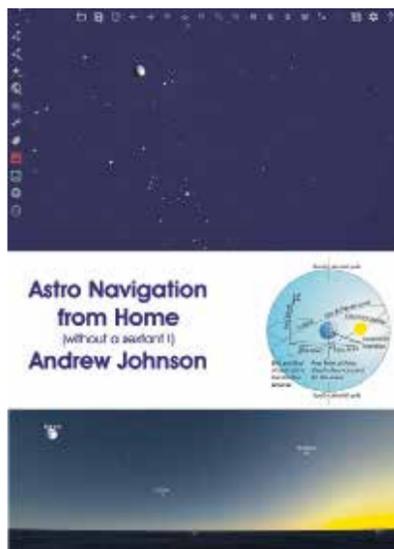
Guides to navigation by the sun and stars

I have always considered the 'noon sight' to be something romantic and intellectually interesting. Having learned from books how to get a fix by measuring the altitude of the sun, I decided to do more. I did the RYA Ocean Yachtmaster course to learn celestial navigation but then Covid arrived and put a stop to any further practice.

So to better understand the calculations and maintain my interest I did what I normally do... bought some more books. At the last count I had 13 of them! They range from pre-GPS days to now. At one stage I had three sextants of different types. So would these two new books fit into my learning?

Phil Somerville's *The Practical Guide to Celestial Navigation* tells you how to just use the sun to navigate. It's 152 pages long and is beautifully written. All the theory and practice is explained clearly with well illustrated diagrams. I spent an enjoyable afternoon reading it.

Andrew Johnson's *Astro Navigation from Home (without a sextant)* is completely different, except it too is clearly written. It is very information-dense and needs a lot of careful thought and study. In 104 pages, it explains how to use most of the celestial bodies. What is really novel is you don't actually need a sextant! Instead, you use a planetarium app (Winstars or



ABOVE Two very different books on the same subject, but both valuable for learning

Stellarium) that will show you all the heavenly bodies and allow you to make your 'sextant' readings. From there you can either make your calculations using a plotting sheet or use another app, TeacupNav. Both methods are explained and illustrated.

You can buy this as an ebook in PDF form from the author's

website, or as a conventional book from Brown Dog Books. At first I was slightly reluctant to try the ebook, but found it worked well as it has live links which take you through to the author's website with worked examples.

The Practical Guide to Celestial Navigation also has links but you have to type them in.

Which book would I buy if I was at the beginning? Probably *The Practical Guide to Celestial Navigation* as it would give me the confidence to buy the second one to build on my knowledge.

In terms of cost, the first is more expensive and may be unnecessary if you want to learn how to use stars and planets. Remember with *Astro Navigation from Home (without a sextant)* you have to buy the software to get full value. However, the reader may feel the first book is unnecessary for them and buy the second one! It's horses for courses.

■ *The Practical Guide to Celestial Navigation*, Phil Somerville, Adlard Coles 2021, £30

■ *Astro Navigation from Home (without a sextant)*, Andrew Johnson. Brown Dog Books 2021, £14.50 (or ebook from astronavfromhome.co.uk £10) **GP**



ABOVE LEFT Gilbert Park using his sextant. **ABOVE RIGHT** Worked examples of astro navigation are available via links from Andrew Johnson's ebook

Lomo tow-float

Jumping in the sea – whether from a boat or land – is one of my all-time favourite things. However, if you're in an anchorage and surrounded by dinghies and other watercraft, it pays to be seen. This is where Lomo's tow-float comes in.

You simply blow it up, pop your belongings inside, and attach it to your waist with a lead. You can barely feel it once you're in the water, but the bright pink or orange bag is very visible to all around you.

I was swimming off Bournemouth recently when a research vessel came close inshore – it stopped immediately when it saw my float. I also find the float handy when swimming in a group.

The float is 51cm x 23cm with a circumference of 50cm. It doubles as a waterproof bag and will comfortably hold a water bottle, pair of sandals, phone and lightweight towel. Often I use it for long swims, not having to worry about returning to the spot I started at.

Another handy feature is the buoyancy. A tow-float isn't a lifesaving device but it is very buoyant and handy for a quick rest if

RIGHT The new orange tow float from Lomo has rucksack straps
BELOW Colours are highly visible pink or orange



you're getting tired. I especially like to have it when swimming with my children.

Lomo has recently launched a tow-float with rucksack straps (£15), making it ideal for combining a walk or run with a swim.

■ Discover the range at lomo.co.uk

AW

Slastik sunglasses

When I visited my optician she reminded me to keep wearing sunglasses through winter. For some reason I only ever wear them for the summer months and spend the rest of the year squinting into the glare.

So when Slastik sent me a pair of sunglasses last October, I decided to put them to the test.

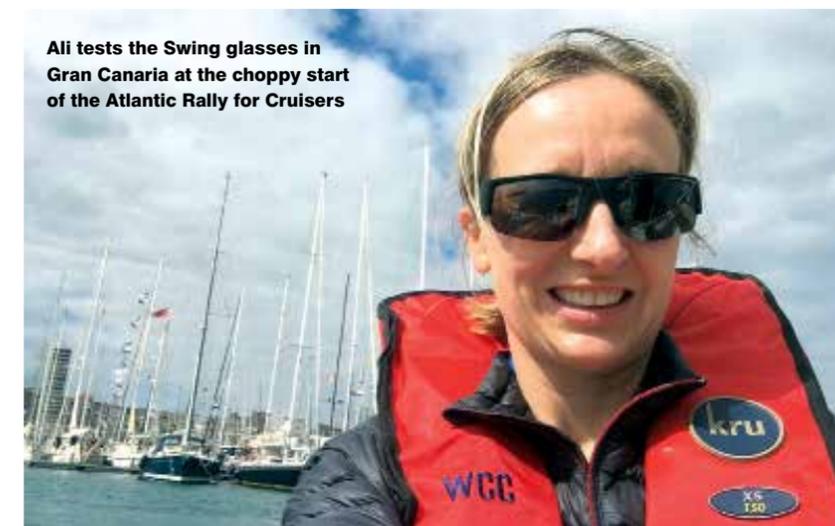
I'd never come across a pair of glasses with a continuous strap before, and these ones took some getting used to. They snap open at the front then click back together through a magnetic fastening point. However, Paul Gilley, of Slastik, urged me to try them.

"We've been selling Slastik glasses for the last year in the UK and it seems most of our customers are from the boating world or builders, oddly enough," he said.

They were certainly comfortable enough, and the pair I chose – the Swing – were so subtly shaded, I forgot I was wearing them. Even on a cloudy day, they weren't too dark, like many sunglasses are. The lenses offer 400% UV protection, and being polarised, prevent harsh reflection from water or snow.



Slastik Swing sunglasses have polarised lenses and magnetic catch attachment



Ali tests the Swing glasses in Gran Canaria at the choppy start of the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers

The problem I had was that when I wanted to take them off, I kept putting them on top of my head. They'd pop up and sit like a crown, before eventually falling off. Finally, the penny dropped; I needed to hang them round my neck.

As soon as I worked out this (fairly

obvious) fact, they became my favourite pair of sunglasses. I've worn them while bouncing across the waves on a powerboat, and ducking booms on dinghies. I also love the fact that when I bow my head to look at a chart, or crane my neck to check the windex, they stay put on my head.

I imagine they'd be good for all extreme sports, and was pleased to hear that Slastik also do optical glasses, which I'm sure will benefit many sailors, who'd otherwise have resorted to contact lenses or leaving their glasses down below.

■ See the range at slastik.co.uk

AW 