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NEW ZEALAND COMPANY WINS U.S. PRODUCT INNOVATION AWARD

New Zealand marine electronics company Vesper Marine has won the 2009 Pittman Innovation Award for creating one of the world's most innovative sailing products.

Vesper Marine's unique collision avoidance product *AISWatchMate*[®] was awarded the 2009 Freeman K. Pittman Innovation Award by the editors of United States magazine SAIL in their annual "Gear of the Year" issue. Selected in the 'Cruising' category, the New Zealand made *AISWatchMate* was highly commended for its ability to warn sailors in advance if they are on a collision course with another ship or any other AIS equipped vessel.

"The *AISWatchMate* system from Vesper Marine has the ability to acquire AIS signals from other vessels and display them on a screen that you can mount anywhere in the cockpit or below deck," said Peter Nielsen of SAIL Magazine and reported in its February 2009 edition. "Radar is handy, but it is expensive and power-hungry and has its limitations, while AIS displays on laptops or chartplotters can be confusing. As a collision-warning system, the *AISWatchMate* can do things that radar and plotters cannot," the magazine said. "It uses a fraction of the power of a radar set and it's a fraction of the cost."

The Universal Shipborne Automatic Identification System (AIS) is a vessel tracking system used worldwide. It is used to communicate navigation information automatically between AIS equipped vessels and coastal authorities. It's use is mandatory on most classes of commercial shipping.

New Zealand-based founders and designers of the *AISWatchMate*, Jeff Robbins and Deirdre Schleigh are thrilled at the accolade and say it is an honour to have their product selected by SAIL's experts as one of the best and most innovative products of the year.

The *AISWatchMate* delivers concise and prioritised information about approaching vessels and integrates it with a vessel's position, course and speed. It calculates the bearing, range and closest point of approach (CPA) for each approaching vessel. Alarm parameters can be customised to suit individual sailing needs and conditions. Filters are provided to help eliminate false alarms and a unique feature graphically shows if a vessel will pass ahead or astern.

Well known experienced sailor and editor of Cruising World magazine, Gary “Cap'n Fatty” Goodlander believes Jeff and Deirdre’s AIS*WatchMate* is the most cost-effective marine safety advance in the world. “If you have money, this adds another string to your bow of safety-related marine electronics. And if you are watching your expenditure then the AIS*WatchMate* is the single most cost-effective product you can buy to prevent collisions,” he says.

Another sailor and Florida-based customer of AIS*WatchMate* Rob Armstrong describes the system as flawless, reassuring and literally lifesaving.

“The information provided by the WatchMate was a huge navigational aid. It alerted us to potential dangerous collisions well in advance and allowed us to contact the ships' Captains.” Armstrong says.

“The AIS*WatchMate* is useful for all types of vessels, whether they’re crossing open seas, staying close to the coast or negotiating their way through a crowded harbour. “It is really designed for anyone who is concerned about their safety,” Robbins says.

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About the Freeman K. Pittman Innovation Award:

The award is named in honour of Freeman K. Pittman, *SAIL*'s technical editor for 14 years who tragically died in 1996 from ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). He was widely respected within the industry as an expert on gear, innovation and technology.

About Vesper Marine:

Vesper Marine was founded by Deirdre Schleigh and Jeff Robbins. The AIS*WatchMate* is the result of their desire to create a powerful, yet simple and affordable, collision warning system. Deirdre and Jeff have spent the last seven years sailing offshore and cruising aboard their 40 ft sloop Vesper. Prior to cruising on their sloop they worked for many years in a variety of high tech ventures.