

## Night vision costs dropping down

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By Richard Hart

**The cost of night-vision video cameras has dropped so much in past 2 years, that they are beginning to appear for the first time in car grills and on pleasure boats. This weekend, Richard Hart used one at 3:00 a.m off Half Moon Bay -- to steer a fishing boat around crab pots in pitch darkness.**

It's the middle of the night, and Alan Tani is heading out to sea. He is threading his way out of the harbor watching an LCD.

He promises, "We'll see bait fish jumping, birds in the water, of course, the crab pot buoys, anything it's pointed at. Dolphins, whales."

What the breakwater at Pillar Point Harbor looks like on this system is almost what it looks like during the day. That infrared image might give you the idea that it's just a black and white view of the day, but (trust me) we're on the ocean in the middle of the night, and it's pitch black out there. I can't see a thing.

We spy crab pot buoys. You don't want to slice these with your propeller or get entangled in them.

The infrared camera on Tani's boat, by a company called FLIR, is one of the first commercial versions of what once cost the military millions.

It is quickly morphing into a consumer device -- even as an accessory for car bumpers.

Andrew Teach, President FLIR Commercial Vision, says, "When you're driving along in the car, you've got a display here to the right that's displaying a thermal image. Objects that are living show up very bright, because their temperature difference is very different from the surrounding, so an animal or a person, for example, shows up as a bright object."

Teach's company argues that infrared offers a wider view than headlights, and even better contrast than daylight. Tani tends to agree. "You can still see a log floating in the water," he says. "You can still see birds in the water, during daylight. The image is exactly the same."

Night vision for cars and boats still cannot be called cheap. A typical installation can cost more than \$4,000. And, if he could have only one device, Alan Tani acknowledges he would choose radar first. But there is no question that seeing in the dark can boost your confidence and safety.

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[Marine Navigator II like the one Alan Tani uses](#)

[PathfindIR auto grill accessory:](#)

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