

Black box AIS

This is by far the most prolific area of the market, and all the major electronics brands will now offer you their own AIS transponder and often a receive-only option as well.

As mentioned earlier, these are often identical inside the box, but the manufacturers will usually have made sure the unit is compatible with their instrument network protocol, meaning that for ease of installation many customers will buy the same brand as their chart plotter.

However, there are several other companies in the running, some of whom specialise in AIS, so it's worth having a look around before taking the most obvious route. Functionality is broadly similar across the board – the Class B specification doesn't allow for many differences between approved units – which makes you wonder why there is such a wide range in prices between transponders. Pricier models do

tend to have more interface options however – check our table to see which one suits your needs best.

Receive-only units vary more as some units only have a single-channel receiver which alternates between the two frequencies. One model particularly worthy of mention is the Sevenstar SeaViewer receiver (£392.50)

which can be upgraded to a transponder unit at a later date – a good way of keeping your options open if you're unsure whether you would like a transponder.

Whether a transponder or receiver, a feature worth looking out for is whether the unit has an integrated VHF splitter, which can sometimes justify a higher price.



Amec Camino 101

£600



Comar AIS-3R

£238



SevenStar SeaViewer

£392

Garmin AIS600



£650



Raymarine AIS350

£345

Other ways to get AIS

Another potentially cost-effective way to get AIS on board is to buy an integrated VHF and AIS. These have the advantage that the splitter is built in, allowing the units to share the same antenna as well as a significant space advantage for small boats. Standard Horizon make the Matrix AIS/GX2100E (from £286) with a built-in receiver, as do Navicom with their RT-650 (£300). Both offer a small, target-style plot on the VHF's screen, but for practical use need linking to a plotter.

Digital Yacht offer several innovative ways to get AIS on board, including their iAIS WiFi adapter (from £380), which adds AIS data to GPS data from your plotter and outputs it via WiFi (or USB) to any suitable laptop, plotter or iPhone/iPad. They also

make the ANT200 receiver (from £160), a combined antenna and dual-channel AIS receiver which outputs NMEA data, and the uAIS (£200), which again combines an antenna and receiver but outputs the data via a USB cable.

Most PC navigation software is now able to accept an AIS input, making devices such as the uAIS more or less plug and play.

MarineGadget are another player in this area, with their neat USB dongle which at £99 offers an attractively cost-effective way to get AIS onboard. You'll need an additional antenna, however, and the unit is single-channel so target acquisition will be slower.



Standard Horizon Matrix AIS/GX2100E

£286



MarineGadget AIS dongle

£99



Digital Yacht iAIS WiFi adapter allows AIS on a laptop, tablet or phone

£380