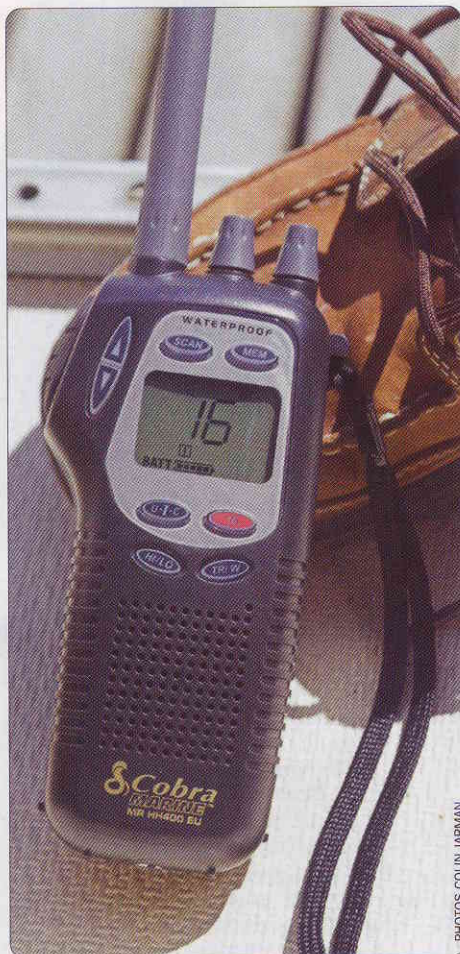
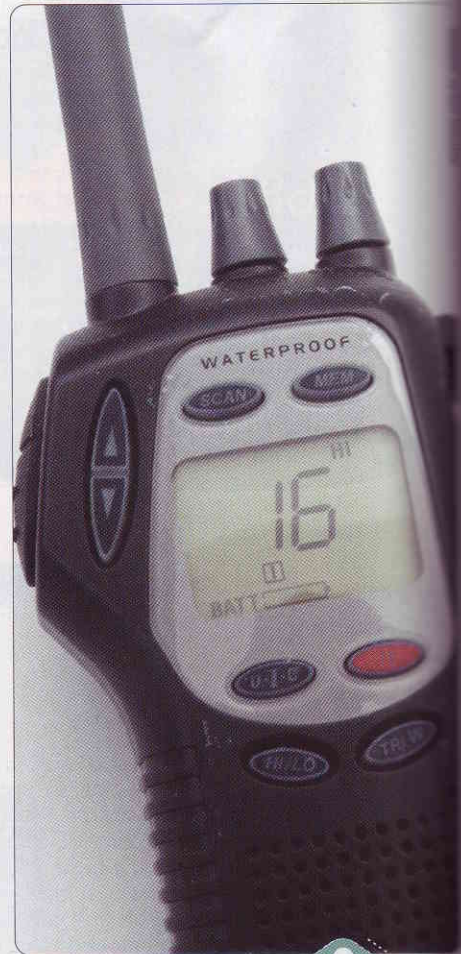


Gear on test



PHOTOS COLIN JARMAN



COBRA HH400 HAND-HELD VHF £129.95

The HH400 is constructed to be waterproof to a depth of 1m for a period of half an hour, which makes it perfectly suitable for general boating use. It's also straight forward to operate and isn't too bulky to put in a cockpit coaming locker or an oilskin pocket, so that it can be used from the helm for checking berthing instructions.

The set has a stubby, rubberised aerial mounted on top beside the squelch and on/off volume knobs. These are of a good size with just enough space around them for operation with gloved fingers. The press to talk (PTT) button and the screen illumination switch are mounted on the side of a bulge at the top of the set and, although easily operated, have caused confusion occasionally with the wrong button being pressed. It's only happened a couple of times and isn't much of a problem; it's just something to be aware of.

On the same bulge in the housing, next to the screen, is a pair of up and down channel changing buttons that work exactly as you would expect, but need to be pushed right in, which can be difficult with thick gloves.

Around the screen, which is of reasonable

size and good clarity, are four buttons: scan, memory (for up to 10 channels), UIC (for swapping between US, International and Canadian frequencies), and a direct Ch 16 button. Just below, there's a Hi/Lo button, for switching between 1W and 5W output, and a Tri Watch button for scanning three user-defined channels.

Power for the set is provided by a tray of either six rechargeable (included with the set) or six alkaline (not included) AA size batteries. For recharging the NiMH batteries, the whole radio drops into a 'cup', which connects either to the mains or the ship's 12V supply via a lighter socket. The VHF locks securely into the charging cup, rather than just being held in place by its weight. The lock ensures full electrical contact and, if the charging cup is screwed down to a suitable surface, will effectively stop the radio flying around the cabin.

When using the HH400 we found that incoming speech was clear and easily understood; we also had no complaints about our broadcast readability either. There always seemed to be plenty of volume when listening

to a communication and the squelch control proved very sensitive.

It's a good idea to make use of the wrist strap that's provided, particularly if you have wet hands or the sea is rough and the boat is lively. The finger grips on the sides of the radio, although usually adequate, are more effective if you hold the radio in your right hand, because then your whole hand wraps round the body of the set and your forefinger rests on the PTT button. If you use your left hand with your thumb on the PTT button, only your fingertips are on the ridges of the grip and your hold is less secure. A belt clip is also provided.

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Verdict ★★★★★

The Cobra HH400 is a good, chunky, solid-feeling hand-held set providing commendable performance at a good price.