

BASSMASTER MAGAZINE

THIS IS A REPRINT OF AN ARTICLE APPEARING IN THE DECEMBER ISSUE OF
BASSMASTER MAGAZINE BY SENIOR WRITER FRANK SARGEANT

MANAGE YOUR BATTERIES

By Frank Sargeant
Senior Writer/Boating

Ben Davis' batteries were dead. After three hours of working against a headwind, he had covered five miles of shoreline on the St. Johns River south of Jacksonville, Fla. but his 24-volt system was tapped out. And Davis wasn't about to crank his outboard and go home – he had broken a prop shaft on a stump before he even reached his favorite honey hole that morning – he had been fishing his way home, to make the best of a bad situation.

Most anglers in Davis' position would have had no alternative but to sit and wait for a tow, but thanks to a unique "Battery Management System" from Wells Marine Technology, Davis had an ace up his sleeve.

He cranked the outboard and immediately began to recharge his trolling motor batteries. The Wells system taps the deepcycles into the charging circuit of the outboard. Running the big motor for 20 to 30 minutes puts a healthy recharge into the trolling system – but as soon as the outboard is shut down, the system isolates the trollers from the cranking battery.

Davis was able to continue fishing all day, with several added recharges via the outboard, and made it back to the weight-in with a catch that brought him 10th place in the tournament.

The Wells system can be used with both 12- and 24-volt trolling motor setups. It takes up little space, and installation takes about 45 minutes for the average shade-tree mechanic – it's simply a matter of screwing the unit down, then connecting the wires from the various batteries to the correct attachments.

Wells says the system will keep your trolling batteries near full charge all day if you operate the outboard a reasonable amount of time running between spots, and it also shortens the time required for topping them off overnight, since they're never fully discharged. But the automatic switching systems protect your starting battery from discharge via the trolling motor.

And, you need make only one connection from the charger to the system to top off all three batteries. Despite the fact that you're splitting the charge three ways, Wells says that you're starting from a nearly charged level, so charging time is actually less with the system – and you don't have to fool with disconnecting one battery in the middle of the night and hooking up the other.

The system can also work on your car, truck or RV to charge auxiliary batteries off the alternator. And Wells has a hook-up that will allow you to charge your boat's batteries while you tow it to the ramp, via a tap into the tow-vehicle charging system.

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