

Multi function set that really works

– and is easy to use

FN's regular electronics writer, **Colin Jones**, reviews the Koden MDP 1200 series which will be exhibited at FISHING 2005.

The Koden MDP 1200 combination display series, which first appeared at the 2005 London Boat Show, is yet one more of the fashionable multi-function displays, showing radar, plotter and fishfinder, either one after the other on a whole screen, or in various combinations by dividing the display area.

They can also display other subsidiary functions like repetition of GPS navigation data.

The titles of the various Koden models are confusing, but the confusion disguises a clutch of excellent and very professional pieces of equipment.

The test model was the 10.4in screen, which surprised me because it looks larger. This might be because it is orientated in panoramic (horizontal) view, which is always better when you start on screen splitting.

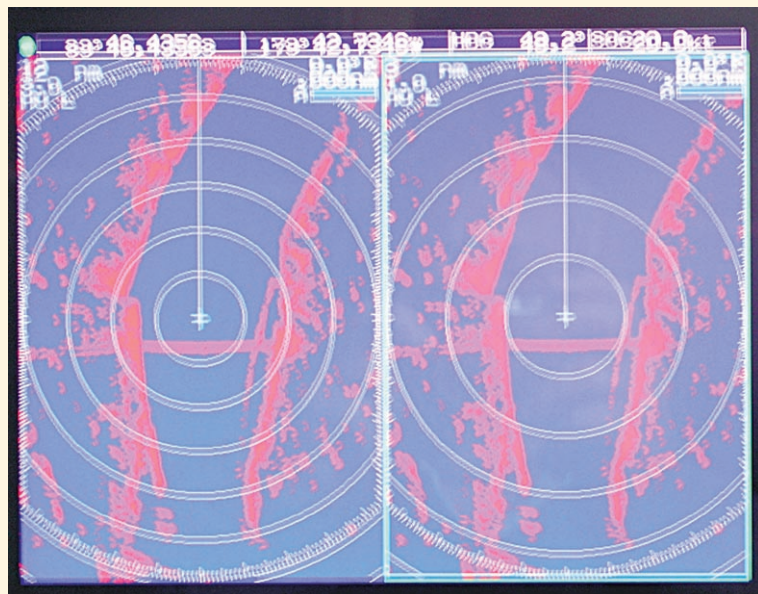
The device is also heavier than I thought it would be. It is ruggedly engineered and on a very firm trunnion which can be set under, or swung up for deck-head installation. This is properly built commercial gear.

This also shows at first fire up. The keyboard and other controls have obviously been designed by somebody who has spent some time at sea, rather than being dreamt up by an anorak at a CAD programme. It was easy enough to find my way around the basic menus, even before opening the handbook.

The functional ease is largely due to large and clear control knobs and buttons and a very easy to find simulator, which is excellent. Any newcomer to this sort of gear would be well advised to spend a day ashore using the 1200 in simulator mode, before trying it out at sea to get at some of the best functions on the menus.

The radar is Koden, who have a good military and commercial pedigree. The MDP 1200 is a dual range model, capable of simultaneously showing, say three miles and six miles on a split display.

The displays have the ability to track 10 targets, so you can keep an eye on which lanes everybody else is trawling. You can adjust the length of the targets' trails by speeding up the update interval and if you are really nosey, you can zoom the



radar in to have a closer look.

A good feature is that all these functions are shown in pictorial graphic boxes along the bottom of the screen and can be accessed in a number of ways. There are 'soft' keys under each box, so a single click opens up that function, but they are all also numbered, so you can get at them by touching the equivalent on the numeric keypad, or by turning the rotary knob until the required box is highlighted.

At sea, when you are trying to do several things at once or the boat is banging about, this makes life much easier, as small buttons are difficult to prod with any accuracy.

The same trio of movement possibilities also operate the menu list. You can either scroll up and down with the knob, or can use the 'gorilla's nipple' (joystick) or press 6 to get at function 6 on the list.

Equally, the 2 x EBL and 2 X VRM are clearly shown in an on-screen box and can be turned on and off by the adjacent soft key, as can the forward view and the guard zone. This is one of the easiest and fastest radars to operate that I have ever seen.

In summary, this is an excellent radar, which is a pleasure to operate either on its manual functions or in automatic Harbour Mode, which optimises all the settings for best discrimination of close approaches as you enter harbour. This function can also be integrated with the radar overlaid onto the chart plotter.

The plotter is C-Map NT but (for the moment) does not accept the latest NT Max standard whose tidal stream info arrows are its most useful feature. As this is a new design, I imagine that it will not be long before a retro fit upgrade is possible and you can soon expect a 'black box' addition that will display AIS alpha-numeric data and actually show the position of the transmitting ships on the map screen. They would be further verified by the radar overlay.

A useful feature is that the

plotter can show different zoom levels on the divided display and, like the radar, the 'active' display section is shown by a highlight border. Any changes you make to this active segment do not affect other display sections.

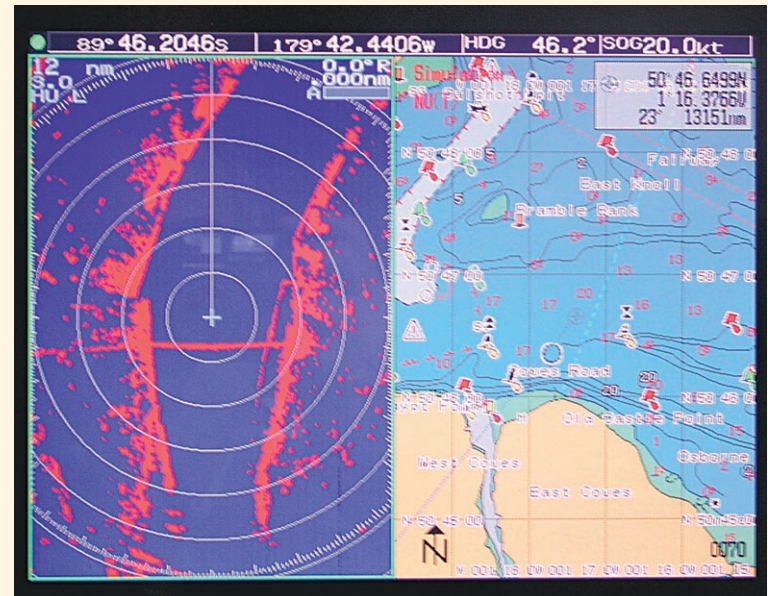
This feature will be even better when AIS is also present. It means that instead of having one very cluttered display, you split the functions between two screens, so both are easier to interpret. (I was amused to note that Koden have become politically correct by changing the universally recognised MOB (man overboard) terminology for POB).

That apart, the plotter is as good as any other, with more route, waypoint and track history memory than you will ever need. It also has three palettes (Day – Night – Twilight) so is always easy to read – especially if you choose track and mark colour (from seven shades) and easily memorised symbols for your marks. These and waypoints can quickly be given names (I hate just numbers) by using the keypad. Data entry is very fast and easy.

As for the depth sounder, there is no significance in the fact that Koden call this part of the rig a 'sounder' rather than a fishfinder. If they are under the transducer, they will show. At switchable 600/1000W and 50/200kHz displayed in 16 colours, this is serious professional gear. It has the ability to show three different depth levels – or bottom lock etc simultaneously and all the bells and whistles needed for commercial work.

Fishfinders are the most difficult to review. Suffice it to say that this one has all the functions expected in commercial equipment and the screen is superb.

Marketing people are keen that a product should have USP – a unique selling point, which makes it different (better) from all the others. With the MDP 1200s this is undoubtedly the very innovative graphical main

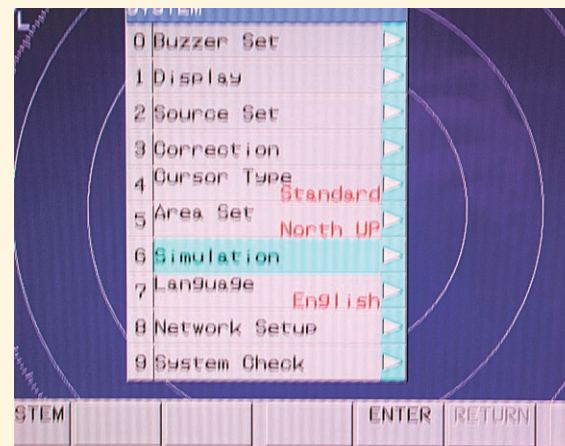


Above: A 'Create' menu allows the skipper to set up any combination of displays.



Far left: The radar split screen allows simultaneous displays of different ranges.

Left: Large knobs make the set very easy to use.



Below left: An onscreen box helps to make the MDP 1200 very fast and simple to operate.

Bottom: The plotter is C-Map NT and includes useful tidal stream arrows.



menu. It shows pictograms of every display that you have configured in the clever 'Create' menu.

Here you decide that you want – say – radar in half and half, or a half and two quarters: or you might want half of the display showing sounder and radar/plotter in quarters on the right. These wholes and parts are very easy to create with the cursor. In the time it has taken me to write this paragraph, I could have set up half a dozen displays. After that, choosing what you want is then just a matter of 'move cursor – click'.

Five years ago, it would have

been difficult to write favourably of a single display handling so many functions. The technology was just not reliable enough for prudent seamanship. However, the new flat, LCD/TFT displays have a very low breakdown incidence and high readability. A small boat could get away with the 8in display, or the 10.4in that we tested. There are larger models for larger wheelhouses.

The answer to the normal question asked of equipment reviewers is "Would you buy it?" In the case of the Koden MDP 1200, the answer is "without hesitation. I want one."