

Star Positions can be all at sea

1999 May 25 by Dr Colin Keay

A Hamilton reader, who is a keen ocean-going yachtsman, has a navigation calculator that is not Y2K compliant.

He doesn't want to come to grief on his way back from Hobart next January, so he wants to know if the stars will then be aligned the same way as in 1972.

That happens to be a year his calculator will accept and, being a leap year, has the same week-day pattern as the year 2000.

That is to say January 1 will be a Saturday and the week days will run through 2000 as they did in 1972.

However, star positions next year (2000) will not be precisely the same as 1972.

This is because the Earth's axis continually varies ('precesses' is the correct term) under the action of the Sun and Moon, completing a circle in the sky every 26,000 years.

This is the reason why astrology is all out of kilter.

The first sign of the zodiac used to be Aries. It is now Pisces.

Returning to the navigation problem, star positions next year will have moved an appreciable fraction of a degree since 1972, quite enough to throw a yacht onto the rocks.

There is no substitute for an up-to-date nautical almanac, and I would advise the yachtsman not to rely on 1972 calculations if he wants to come home safely.

For more information on why 'astrology' is doomed visit the links below....

<http://www.skeptics.com.au/skeptic/1999/1.pdf>

<http://skepdic.com/forer.html>

<http://www.badastronomy.com/bad/misc/astrology.html>