



How to service a winch

Service winches regularly for safety, easy running and longevity, says Rachael Sprot of Rubicon 3

(www.rubicon3.co.uk)

A backwinding winch can be extremely dangerous and cause serious injury, so winches should be serviced every year to clean the mechanism, check for damage and replace worn parts. Springs and pawls, the heart of the ratchet system inside, are most likely to jam or fail, so should be replaced on a regular basis. You're also checking that the gears and teeth are not worn or burred, and that there is no serious corrosion. After that, it's a simple case of cleaning and regreasing to keep things spinning smoothly.

SETTING UP

1 Most winches can be taken apart with two tools – a flat-headed screwdriver and a set of Allen keys. Protect your decks with a sheet or cardboard, and it's a good idea to put something over the guardwires to stop any parts dropping over the side. Have a small container to hand for the small parts. You'll need a cleaning agent, a toothbrush, winch grease, and oil. Finally have a manual to hand in case you get lost, and a smartphone to take photos to retrace your steps if needs be.



STRIPPING DOWN

2 Some winches will have a circlip or locking ring, but on this Harken winch, there's a screw at the bottom of the handle socket, which allows you to remove the cover and undo the screws that hold the drum on. As you lift the drum take care no bearings drop out of the bottom.

You can then remove the bearings, undo the screws around the assembly base and lift it off to reveal the gears. Carefully take the gears off and lay them out in order, the same way up you take them out.

To remove the pawls, slide a small flat-headed screwdriver under the spring to lift it out of its recess, and slide it out.



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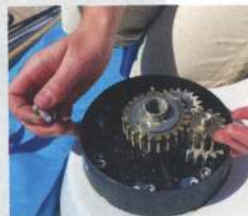
CLEANING

3 Grease collects salt and dirt so will need cleaning off. Use a tub of mineral spirit or diesel and scrub with a toothbrush. As you go, check for wear or corrosion. Dry off, then grease the gears and teeth with winch grease or marine grease. Non-metal bearings don't need to be greased, but a tiny amount can help.



REASSEMBLY

4 Replace the pawls and springs into their housings – pinch the spring into the pawl, then slide it down. Just use pawl oil, or light oil, as grease will go sticky and can make the pawl stick. Make sure the gear rings go back in the right way round. Newer winches have rings that are reversible for longer life. Before replacing the gears, check the pinions are secure and free of corrosion. Secure the central body, replace the bearings and slide the drum back on.



FINAL CHECKS

5 Make sure the rope stripper for the self tailer points into the cockpit, as this is where the rope tail will go as you winch. Dab anti-corrosion compound onto the screws and hand tighten – check with a torque wrench if you have one. Give it a spin to check the ratchet works and the winch doesn't backwind.

■ Watch the video online at https://youtu.be/ybsq_4RwBJA



Images: Matthew Sheahan