

Mid-season checks

To maximise your time on the water this boating season, the experts at boatcare share their advice to keep your boat running smoothly.

Regular maintenance will help keep your boat at its best throughout the year so you can spend more time on the water and less time fixing things. Here are some practical tips to keep you sailing and boating.

Engine

Regularly look over your engine; check fluid levels, and look for cracked or leaking hoses and loose belts. Check exhausts for corrosion, leaks, and fluffing gaskets. Exhaust systems should be deconstructed every two to three years to ensure the longevity of your engine.

Battery

Your battery is the heart of your boat. Without it your engine won't start and electrical components won't work. Look after your battery and check it often during the boating season. Note, batteries naturally degrade over time so don't neglect these checks. Test the battery's charge with a digital multimeter and inspect the connections for corrosion. Use a wire brush to clean the connectors, and add grease if needed.

Bilge pump

The bilge is the bottom part of the boat that collects excess water, and the bilge pump removes water from the bilge – if it doesn't work your boat could sink. To keep your boat afloat, check the bilge area, pump and hoses for debris that could cause clogs. Also, consider adding a backup bilge pump. Ensure pumps work properly by manually filling your bilge with a hose. Then, watch your pump at work – if it effectively removes the water, you're probably safe to launch. This is also



Make sure you regularly check the engine oil level.

a good time to test your manual bilge pump, an important safety item should your primary pump fail.

Seacocks and valves

Regularly check all through-hull connectors, checking valve handles and seacock connections. These should open and close easily with no leaks and no movement or wobble on the fitting when you turn the handle.

Electrical lines and shore power cables

Electrical leads must be in good condition to keep the electrical system on your boat up and running. Deteriorating lines could be a fire hazard. To prevent electrical leads from wearing down, keep them clean, and use a digital multimeter to make sure everything's working. Keep the electrical system clean and ensure connections are tight to prevent fire hazards. Any damaged, exposed wires or faulty plugs or sockets should be replaced immediately.



A digital multimeter will help you to identify any electrical problems.

off. Remove the oil via the sump plug or use an oil extraction pump. While the oil drains, change the oil filter. After the oil has drained out, replace the drain plug and tighten the screw. Fill the engine with new oil, ensuring it is the correct grade for your engine. Check the dipstick for levels, run, and then re-check the level later once the engine is cold.

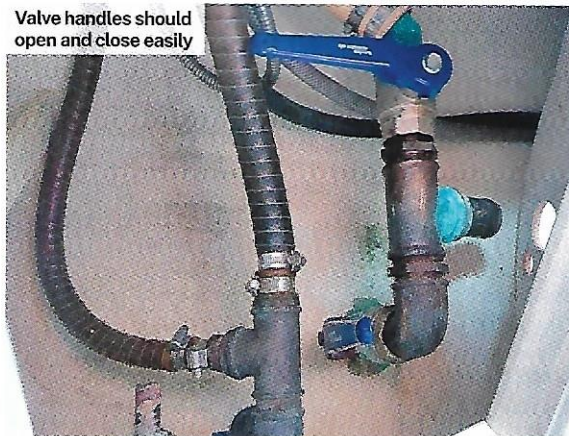
Other fluid levels

To make sure your boat runs properly, remember to regularly check other fluid levels such as hydraulics and coolant.

Test the boat lights

Check the exterior lighting on both your boat and any trailer. Test the indicator lights, brake lights, and sidelights, on trailers. Check navigational lights, port, starboard, masthead light, anchor light

Valve handles should open and close easily



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Oil and filter

Stay on schedule with changing the oil and oil filter. Failing to change the oil could damage engine parts. To change the oil, let the engine run to the correct operating temperature, then turn it

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deck light and stern light. Checking your lights are in good working condition will ensure your safety when boating at night.

Check fuel and electrical systems

Examine the fuel lines for soft spots, cracking and brittleness. Look for stains and the smell of fuel around fittings since these are signs of leaks: replace them as necessary.

Running rigging

Mid-summer is the best time to think about any modifications that will reduce friction or make sail handling easier, or to check for any possible problems that might become apparent. While most running rigging has a long life, especially on cruising yachts, it can easily be damaged by chafe. It's worth keeping a constant eye open for new problems, especially where halyards pass over sheaves. Similarly, examine splices in the ends of halyards and other lines on a regular basis to see if there are any signs of movement that could indicate the splice is starting to fail.

Standing rigging

There are two aspects to ensuring the integrity of a boat's standing rigging.

Firstly, the tuning must be correct so the spar is correctly supported. If this aspect is wrong – and there are many cruising yachts with woefully slack cap shrouds – the rig stands a reduced chance of remaining intact.

Secondly, it's important to be sure that each of the many components is in good order. A visual check won't tell you



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Test all of the exterior lights regularly so you can be seen at night



Katy Stickland

Check running rigging regularly for chafe

When was the last time your liferaft was serviced?



Make sure the inflation cylinder is fully screwed into place on your liferaft



everything, as there may be hairline cracks that foster corrosion, but it's a good place to start.

Safety equipment

Check that all the safety kit is in good order. Common problems include defunct lifebuoy lights, lifejackets with inflation cylinders that are not fully screwed in place and aged fire extinguishers. Check that your liferaft servicing is up to date and that lifejackets have been serviced within the last 12 months and are equipped with sprayhoods, lights and crotch straps. Be sure you have enough lifejackets on board and that they are in good condition. In addition, flares, EPIRBs and the contents of first aid kits need to be replaced at regular intervals. Make sure you have safety flares, a charged fire extinguisher, a first aid kit, and a flashlight all stored in a waterproof container.

Exterior Cleaning

It's critical to keep your boat's exterior clean for several reasons, besides showcasing its beauty. For one, keeping your boat clean helps prevent the spread of invasive species. It's recommended to clean your boat every time you remove it from one body of water to protect the next body of water you launch it in. Secondly, keeping your boat clean protects the structure of the vessel by keeping the finish intact. Over time, salt from the sea will form crystals causing abrasions and scratches that could



Fuel lines should be inspected for cracking or soft spots

be costly to remove or repair. Lastly, a clean boat simply performs better. A dirty hull can increase fuel costs by as much as 30%. If you need to clean your boat in the water, use safe products and avoid toxic substances. No matter where you clean your boat, you will need to rinse it with fresh, clean water to remove the salt.

Glassfibre

Most glassfibre boats have a glossy gel coat finish that protects the glassfibre from salt, sun and other weather elements. You can tell that a gel coat finish needs attention when it takes on a chalky appearance. To keep your glassfibre boat in good condition, wax or polish it with waxes designed to protect the gel coat. Aim to apply a coat of wax twice a season, preferably in the spring and before you store your boat for the winter. Other than waxing your boat occasionally, make sure to wash away dirt and salt after every outing. Use soap designed for boats and gentle brush or sponge. Avoid scrubbing the teak too hard.

For more tips or information about boatcare by boatfolk: boatcare.co.uk