

Spring Launch

The best checklist for a spring launch is one that the boat owner has created, recorded, and followed over a period of time. It is however from experience that one notes this is not always done. To help new boat owner or to give some guidance to a seasoned one, the following is offered as a “Check List”.

Out of the Water - Underbody

Hull - While your boat is on stands or in a cradle is the best time to do a detailed inspection of the portions of your boat that are otherwise inaccessible. Do a complete and slow walk-around noting any areas of concerns. Chips, dings, scrapes etc should be attended – especially those that have gone deep enough to expose the fiberglass cloth. Smaller blisters can be sanded and filled. Larger issues such as osmosis or damage from collision or grounding should be looked by a professional if they are beyond the owner’s skill set.

Through-hulls - Inspect and clear all external screens and in particular those servicing any cooling system. Mussels can attach to the inside of the strainer restricting the flow of water to the cooling system causing the machinery to overheat.

Zincs and Anodes – Check all zincs and anodes for deterioration. If any looked pitted they should be replaced. If the zinc has been substantially reduced, check all metal underwater fittings to ensure they did not suffer from electrolysis. Zincs that are substantially reduced during a season are generally an indication that an electrical problem exists on the dock to which your boat is tied.

Props and Drive Shaft –Inspect the prop for any ding or dents. A damaged prop should be replaced or taken to a machine shop to be repaired. Make sure the pins are secure. Grip the props and try moving the shaft. Any excessive play is an indication the cutlass bearing is worn and possibly needs to be replaced.

Rudder – Inspect the rudder. Try moving it. Make sure the rudder stock has not been bent. Any irregularities must be corrected – the method and solution depends on the type of installation. Call a professional if beyond your skill set.

Outdrives and Outboards - Replace zincs that show signs of deterioration. Inspect the bellows of the sterndrive and replace if it shows any signs of excessive wear or deterioration. Check the power steering (if equipped) and power trim oil levels. Follow the manufacturer’s maintenance schedule or have the unit serviced by an authorized service agent.

Anti Fouling – There are many differences in anti-fouling paints. Some can be applied months before the boat is launched, for others, the boat must be launched within hours of painting it. Some paints are made so that the boat may be pulled and relaunched without repainting. If you are changing to a different paint, some can be applied over the existing paint, others are not compatible and the existing paint must be completely removed. If you have had your boat for years you know doubt will know what paint you used. However, if you have recently purchased a boat that has anti-fouling on it, try to establish from the previous owner what was used. If that is not possible, a ship chandlery might be able to help but it will only be their best guess.

Out of the Water – On Deck

Check all surface fittings for signs of water penetration – especially around chainplates and winches. Leaking fittings will cause water damage in the core and possible delamination. Chainplates attached to a bulkhead may require the bulkhead to be replaced. Rebed the fittings as necessary. If you do not own a moisture meter, hire a local surveyor to check the areas for you. It may be well worth the \$50 or so they might charge.

Out of the Water – Inside

Through-hulls – Check all through-hulls to ensure they operate with minimum effort. (Don't forget the one you missed last year because it was difficult to do.) Lubricate all valves. Check all hoses and clamps. (Although not required by any standard, double gear clamps in opposing directions are often used on all underwater fittings.) Older boats had gate valves mounted on through-hulls. Ensure they are operational and replace any that cannot be closed. Replace gate valves quarter-turn valves or seacock. The position of the handle indicates whether the valve is opened or closed.

Close all valves before launch!!!!

Stuffing Box – Rudder and Drive Shaft – Check your maintenance records. When was the last time either was repacked? Some rudder boxes can be repacked while the boat is in the water. Most drive shaft stuffing boxes can only be repacked while the boat is out of the water!

Control Cables – Check the outer jackets of control cables connecting the steering, throttle or transmission. If the jacket is dry and cracking or shows signs of wear or swelling, the cable should probably be replaced.

If you have wheel steering, all steering cables must be checked. There are many different types of steering systems. Follow the maintenance recommendations of the manufacturer.

Exhaust and Fuel Systems – Inspect all the system components including the fuel tank.

All hoses connected to the fuel tank should be inspected for wear or deterioration – fill hose, vent hose and the pick-up hose that supplies the engine with fuel. All hoses should be supported with non-combustible clips and without any sharp edges that could cut into the line. If the hose must be replaced, ensure you obtain a hose that is properly rated for marine application. The most current rating specification at the time of this article is USCG A1-15 or SAE J1527 or ISO 7840.

Clean or replace the filter element of the fuel filters.

Inspect the exhaust hose from the engine to the exit. If any part of the hose is suspect, replace it.

While you are next to the engine, check that the blower hose is properly connected and has not been dislodged, crushed or cut. Check to ensure the blower is operational.

Electrical Systems – Check the battery terminals to ensure they are clean and the contacts are solid. Loose connections can 'arc' creating a great amount of heat and can cause a fire. Check all fuses. Do you have spares? Ensure the batteries are fully charged and will maintain the charge. If they cannot maintain a charge, replace the battery.

Potable Water – Flush the potable water system. Storage tanks can be flushed with vinegar-water solution then flushed again with potable water. Run water through all fixture supply lines.

Other Spring Chores

Inspect all fueled appliances (stove, heaters etc). Examine all fuel lines, valves and connections for leaks. If propane is on board, inspect the tanks for rust and the expiry date. Replace as necessary. Ensure the solenoid valve is functioning (should be normally closed).

Check the gauge on each fire extinguisher and replace or recharge as necessary.

Check the expiry dates on flares and other emergency equipment and replace as necessary.

Check running lights ensuring all function. (Are there spare bulbs aboard?)

Wipe out the fridge / ice box with a vinegar / water solution.

Inspect all lockers to ensure all are clean and dry.

Sail Boats – Mast and Rigging

If your mast was stored for the winter, while it is on the ground, inspect all standing rigging components. Look closely at the swaged ends of fittings looking for any cracks in the fittings or rust marks on the wires. Put a drop of lubricant on all turnbuckle threads. Check all sheaves and replace when necessary.

Check all running rigging. Any ‘meat hooks’ suggest the rigging is at its end of useful life.

If the boat was stored with the mast in place, complete a similar inspection once the boat has been launched.

You should have the sails service every couple of years. If you did not do so in the fall, get them to your local sail loft as soon as possible. Everyone will be pushing the loft for service in the spring.

Trailers

Don’t forget to inspect your trailer. Tires should be inspected. Cracked sidewall or shallow treads would suggest the tire should be replaced. (The inspection also includes the spare tire.)

Check the trailer lights: running lights, signal lights and backup lights (if equipped). Replace any malfunctioning bulbs and remember to carry a spare bulb matching each light.

Inspect the bearings and repack as necessary.

Test the winch, either manual or electric to ensure it is working properly.

Test and lubricate the trailer jack.

Last, but not least, inspect the trailer for rust. Sand and repaint the area as necessary.

Summary

The foregoing is not meant to be a complete and concise list due to the variety of boats available and the complexity of the equipment on board each vessel.

It is meant however to give the reader a process to follow that will allow the individual boat owner to inspect their boat from bow to stern and from the bottom of the keel up.

Every boat should have a maintenance log or at the very least a notebook detailing what service was done, when and what material was used. With the reference it allows the boat owner to purchase identical replacement equipment.

The more preparation done ashore before launch the less likely an unforeseen event will interrupt your boating season. For those that live in the more northern climates where the water tends to get hard in the winter, in a very good year we have twenty-five weekends of use – in a bad year about sixteen weekends. Prepare now – make the most use of the time we have.

Don't forget to have fun "just messing about in boats".

Fair winds and following seas!