

Winter Survival for Seawards



Sitting on Endeavour this morning with the wind howling and rain hammering down on the roof, my thoughts are drawn to winterization of our vessels. Winter means low temperatures, lots of rain, damp interiors and spending extended periods away from our pride and joy.

So, how can we make sure that our vessel stays in tip-top condition? The first of a few decisions is whether we want to use the boat during the winter or are we going to lift her and store her ashore fully winterized.

I'm keen on winter boating as we get some great winter days, the marinas are empty and often cheap, and there's always a table in our favourite pub so let's take a look first at keeping our boat in the water:

Clean and Tidy



Give the boat a good, thorough clean inside and out. A soapy wash-down followed by a coat of wax outside will help protect the topsides and make black rain streaks easier to wash off and get rid of the start of green on canvas. Inside clean through the lockers, all the hard to get places and clean and dry the engine spaces and bilges, this helps keep moisture levels down and means that new leaks or drips show up easily and can be quickly diagnosed.

Doing a thorough clean also means that you will find every little thing that needs tightening, touching up or repairing.

A lift and scrub is not a bad idea at the end of the season, she won't grow much weed during winter and it's a good chance to inspect props, p-brackets and bearings.

Lines and Fenders

It's likely that we'll visit the boat less often and the weather will be more challenging for our lines and fenders so let's double up the lines and pop a few more fenders out to spread the load. If the prevailing wind means you're on a windward berth it may be worth considering 'cross lines' on the weather side to hold her off the pontoon (subject to the space and permission from the marina). We need to keep the bow and stern lines reasonably long (not loose) to prevent snatching.



Sea Cocks

We would, of course, always say that sea cocks should be shut when leaving the boat but, during the season, this practice is rarely followed. Whatever your standard practice, make sure all the sea cocks operate smoothly and, as we're likely to leave the boat for longer periods, turn the sea cocks off when leaving the boat. A big sign hung at the helm should prevent starting the engines without turning them on again.



Electrics and Electronics

Go through all the electrical and electronic equipment and make sure it's working, you may not have used the nav lights for months.

Clean electrical connections and terminals and spray them with a silicon free lubricant.

Check battery condition, winter has a habit of killing off weak batteries. If they are the non-sealed type check the levels and top up as necessary. If possible keep the batteries on a trickle charge to keep them at their best or keep the battery switches off so that only the bilge pumps are connected.

Don't forget the external connections to things like lights and vhf aerials, make sure they're in good condition and sealed against the weather.

Engines and Fuel

Now is a great time for an engine service, new oil will help prevent corrosion and all the filters and consumables will be new. At the least, an oil change is a great idea and it's worth changing the fuel filters.

Check the coolant level and make sure that the proportion of coolant to water is enough for a cold winter. A full coolant system prevents corrosion.

The sea water side of the coolant system is unlikely to freeze in the UK but the additional safety of a low temperature greenhouse type heater in the bilge or in each engine space would just ensure that the engines and pipework are always above freezing; these can be secured in place by brackets so that they can be permanently wired in and will not go roaming about in the engine compartments.



Keep diesel tanks topped right up during winter, this ensures that no water is drawn from the



atmosphere into the bottom of the tank, keeping the dreaded bug at bay. Pop by the fuel barge after each trip and don't forget to 'dose up' the fuel with a good anti-bug treatment.

Grease up any linkages and moving parts and give the engines a general spray over or wipedown with light oil. It's worth undoing the fuel, water and waste pipe caps and smearing a bit of Vaseline round the rubber 'o' ring, this will prevent rain water getting in and stop the rubber becoming brittle.

Canvas Covers

The covers are going to take a bit of a hammering from the weather so now is a good time to check and repair any issues, splits and tears will only get bigger and the cover will be less pliable in the cold (especially the windows) so make sure all of the fixings and bungees work and fit as they should. Give the turn buckles, poppers and zips a little smear of Vaseline (a candle rubbed on zips is also good) and the cover should see the winter through without too much trouble. We have to be extra careful folding covers in the winter as the windows are likely to split if they're cold. Carefully rolling them up is the best way.



Inside

Cold and damp is the enemy of our boat's interior. Upholstery and woodwork act like sponges, soaking up water out of the atmosphere and becoming mouldy and smelly. If we're connected to shore power prevention is easy, a small, oil filled electric radiator (ideally screwed to a wide board to prevent toppling), located in the lowest cabin area and set to a low level will keep the interior just warm enough to keep the damp at bay. A couple of greenhouse heaters located in different parts of the boat will also do a good job. In addition, a small dehumidifier, with

a pipe running into the sink, will help a lot; a low setting is good for these as they can over-dry woodwork.

In the absence of shore power it's worth getting some of the 'no power' dehumidifiers and dotting them around the boat.

It's good to stand the cushions up on edge so that the air can circulate around them and make sure lockers are not stuffed with bedding or clothes. Take off anything you don't think you'll need.

While hatches and windows will be battened down against the weather, make sure the air inlets are clear and able to ventilate the boat.

If we're not on shore power and able to keep the interior warm we have to consider draining down the hot and cold fresh water system when there's a risk of freezing weather. Run all the water through the taps and when both systems are empty leave the taps open and turn off the water pump. If a waste tank is fitted, we need to clean through the system with fresh water and cleaner and ensure that the system is empty, a split waste pipe is the last thing we want.

Run the Engines

When we visit the boat we should run the engines up to normal temperature even if we're not planning to go anywhere, this moves the oil and coolant around, preventing corrosion as well as ensuring belts and impellers don't harden and take on a 'memory'. If not on shore power, run the engines for a good half an hour to give the batteries a boost.

It's worth opening and closing the sea cocks, inspecting the bilges and generally looking through the boat for any issues.



Winter Ashore

If we decide to winter our boat ashore then pretty much everything that we have already discussed is applicable the only difference being that we won't be able to run the engines. After servicing the engines we can remove the belts and impellers and, in the absence of shore power, ensure that the hot and cold fresh water system, waste system and sea water cooling system are drained down; these can even be primed with a non-toxic anti-freeze.

There's no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong type of boat!

Happy winter boating...