

HULL & DECK

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Should I have a survey?

Q I think I've found my first boat, but have been advised to have it surveyed. Is this necessary?

A It may seem like job creation for a surveyor to respond so emphatically, but the answer is a resounding 'yes'. A condition survey serves two purposes. First, it checks that the boat is safe and, second, that it's worth the money. In about 60-70% of cases, defects are found that result in significant adjustments in the sale price. One final point: older boats may be impossible to insure without a current survey.

Keel bolts

Q Following a survey on my wooden boat, the surveyor has suggested it would be wise to remove a couple of keel bolts for inspection. Wouldn't it be easier to X-ray them?

A X-rays are expensive and disruptive – you have to cordon off the area to prevent harm to passers by. Also, X-rays can't see through iron or lead, so flaws in those parts of the bolts buried within the keel itself will go undetected.

Also, think about this: if you pay for the X-ray and find a problem, you have to remove the keel bolts anyway. It's better to set up an inspection schedule to draw the bolts in rotation – say a couple every three years or so.



Checking for moisture content in the hull, which can lead to blistering

Hull blisters need checking out

Q My hull has a few blisters and I'm thinking of applying a couple of coats of epoxy to stop it getting worse. Is this wise?

A Although it may seem a good idea, you should resist the temptation. Your blisters are filled with an acidic viscous 'soup' which is made up of compounds from within the laminate taken into solution by seawater absorbed through the gel coat. The osmotic mechanism strives to equalise the densities of the seawater and soup by drawing more water in from outside – a process that will continue, albeit slowly, through the epoxy. It would be better to save your money until you can deal with it comprehensively. This will involve peeling the gel coat and washing away the contaminants before drying and reinstating the hull.

Open seams

Q After several months ashore, the carvel planking on my wooden boat has opened up slightly. Should I fill the seams with epoxy?

A No. When the boat is relaunched, the planks will swell, mainly across their width. With the gaps now closed by an unyielding filler – the epoxy – this action will produce huge tensile loads on the timbers (ribs) inside, which may well crack under the strain. Try and use whatever was there before – probably white lead putty on the topsides and red lead putty underwater.

Insurance survey

Q Before they extend my policy, my insurance company want a full 'out-of-the-water survey' on my 15-year-old boat. Is there not a lesser (and cheaper) form of inspection – perhaps like a car's MOT?

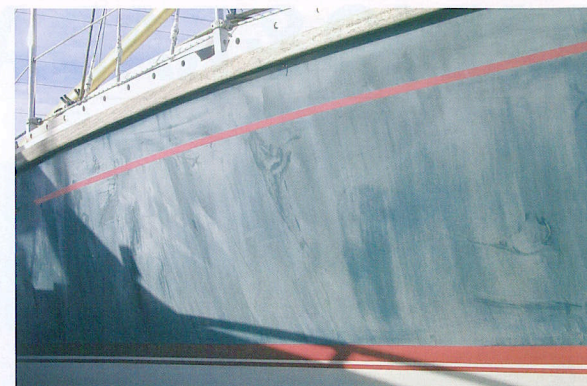
A Good question, but just try getting the insurers to agree on what they want. One company I approached sent me a list longer than the one I use for surveying. Even the ventilation was included!

To be fair, surveys do more than MOTs, since they reflect general levels of maintenance and identify areas in need of improvement. And,

Faded gel coat

Q The gel coat on my boat's topsides is very faded. I polish it every year but it's becoming harder and harder to restore the shine. Is it time to paint it?

A Assess the gel coat's condition objectively. If it looks thin and there are numerous pinholes, it's reaching the end of its useful life and painting will soon be necessary. Clear acrylic-based coatings are easy to apply and will bring short-term relief. They must be removed before painting. If you plan to paint in the foreseeable future, avoid waxes and, particularly, silicones like the plague. Many so-called quick fixes bring nightmares later.



Faded gel coat needs lots of TLC



unlike MOTs, they're not an annual requirement – every five years or so being typical.

▲ Surveys need to be thoroughly carried out by a professional surveyor

Springy GRP deck?

Q The decks on my GRP boat are slightly springy and creak when I walk on them. Why is this, and what can I do about it?

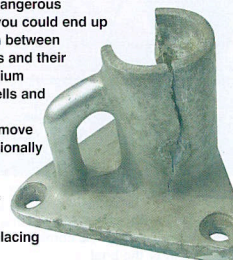
A This is almost certainly core separation – where the core has come away from the outer skin of the deck. If the core is balsa, and there's a chance that water might have entered – perhaps through a chain plate – then it may also have rotted and the problem could be serious. Professional advice should be sought. The repair options vary according to the circumstances, and may simply involve injecting an epoxy resin through holes drilled in the deck.

Cracked stanchion base

Q One of my aluminium stanchion bases has cracked. Should it be replaced?

A Definitely. This is a common and potentially dangerous problem. If ignored, you could end up overboard. Corrosion between aluminium stanchions and their bases creates aluminium hydroxide, which swells and eventually bursts the sockets. It pays to remove the stanchions occasionally and clean off any corrosion build-up. Then wrap the end of the stanchions with PTFE tape before replacing them in the base.

▼ Corrosion burst the stanchion base



Cracked gel coat

Q I have found some fine cracks in my gel coat which seem to coincide with a bulkhead inside. Should I have this repaired?

A This is called stress crazing – where the relatively flexible hull panel has flexed around a structural 'stress raiser' – the bulkhead. The damage probably extends some way into the laminate – ie, goes deeper than the gel coat. If below the waterline, a proper structural repair will most certainly be necessary. If high on the topsides there should be much less urgency.

Dodgy non-slip

Q The moulded non-slip texturing on my decks has lost much of its grip. They are now quite slippery. What can I do to improve it?

A A non-slip deck paint would be the cheapest and easiest remedy. A more enduring solution would be to use a surfacing material such as Treadmaster or TBS, both of which come in sheet form and must be stuck on with adhesives. Of these, Treadmaster is probably the smartest and most durable, but it doesn't come cheap.



▲ Crew safety can depend on the quality of the non-slip deck

▲ A keel bolt wasting away

