

# Winter lay-up tips

Rupert Holmes looks at key considerations when laying up ashore... plus top tips from PBO readers and contributors

GUIDE TO  
**worry-free  
winter  
LAYUP**



Rupert Holmes

**M**any of us are lucky enough to be able to keep our boats afloat all year and can therefore sneak in some winter sails – or even short cruises – in periods of good weather. For others there's no option but to haul ashore.

Whatever the reason, or time of year, laying up for a period out of the water requires a similar process. Most boatyards, for example, insist that roller furling headsails are removed beforehand. This is a sensible policy given the carnage that could be wrought if the sail became unfurled during a gale.

It's also a good move to remove all other canvas work, including sail covers, sprayhoods and dodgers during any long lay-up, summer or winter. In winter these gather dirt and mould, often at an alarming rate, while leaving them fitted for long periods in the summer will result in UV damage and consequent loss of strength. This is what I do with my boat in Greece – the sail cover still looks almost new after 20 years, as does the lifebuoy.

Batteries will discharge at a rate of 2-3% per month if left unattended. If they weren't fully charged on laying up this can result in significantly reduced charge that may cause problems when the time comes to launch. Keeping charge levels topped up while the boat is ashore will also help maximise their lifespan. There are a number of ways to achieve this

without going through the hassle of taking them home.

If there's a permanent shore power supply to the boat this can be connected to the type of battery charger that can be left on continuously. At the other end of the scale are very small solar panels – if their rating in watts is less than 10% of the battery capacity (measured in amp-hours) then they can be left permanently wired in without a charge controller. This is the method I used until just over 10 years ago. It proved both reliable and cost effective, using 5-10W solar panels that cost around £10 each and could simply be laid on deck when the boat was out of commission.

Today I use larger solar arrays that are permanently wired in via a regulator. This means I know the batteries are charged with the same regime when the boat is ashore, as when it's in commission.

## Fill her up!

Diesel tanks should be topped up to prevent condensation adding water to the fuel, which can then prompt the growth of bacteria that may subsequently clog fuel filters. If possible it's worth making time to check there's no water already in the tank. Many are fitted with either a drain tap at the lowest corner, or an inspection access on top, which will allow a sample of the fuel to be taken. If this the fuel is clear then you have no worries, but if it shows water or dark bacteria, then the problem will

**ABOVE** Don't be tempted to haul ashore and then leave the boat until spring

only get worse during layup and should be dealt with immediately.

In an ideal world it would be possible to drain water tanks and leave them open to ventilate. Unfortunately, that's not always either possible or practical. Nevertheless, leaving old water to fester in them for an extended period is not recommended. Equally, if you're laying up over the winter you'll want to ensure water in pumps and so on won't freeze. Given it's almost impossible to empty water from all elements of the system, a sensible precaution is to flush through both hot and cold water systems with a propylene glycol-based antifreeze intended for drinking water systems.

Those who leave their boats afloat over the winter in southern England tend not to winterise engines, hoping instead that the combination of higher water temperatures and the salinity of sea water will protect against freezing. But it's a different matter when hauling ashore, when raw water cooled diesel engines in particular are at risk if not winterised.

Traditionally the best time to service an engine was after laying up – that way there's no old acidic oil sitting in the motor for months on end. This is less of a problem for modern oils, but the principle is still a good one as any problems found

## The laying-up list

**Regular contributor Ken Endean explains his winter worklist**

As soon as our boat is launched I start to make entries in a dedicated notebook. It's a list of everything that will require special maintenance during the laid-up period (ie excluding regular annual items such as antifouling). It includes non-urgent repairs, desirable additions or changes, and any bright ideas for improvements and better sailing.

For instance, this year's list starts with a note to re-grind the heads inlet seacock, which has been dribbling water but cannot be fixed while afloat and will dry up as soon as the boat is ashore.

It may include cosmetic annoyances such as rusty anchor chain: after 10 years or so it will leave stains on the deck and will need replacing but I might forget about it while it is ashore and drying out in the chain locker.

Things like defective drawer catches will only be noticeable while at sea and well heeled.

Last year's list included disabling the swivels on two blocks to make their lines run more smoothly, without twisting. If the ensign has flapped itself to death and needs replacing, that will be recorded, and the list will serve another useful function in December.

If the family ask what Dad wants for Christmas, my wife can consult the notebook and a new ensign will be better than a pair of port-and-starboard socks.

### The hull and openings

Any issues affecting the hull in water must be identified before the boat comes ashore, especially if that involves tracing or testing.

If you think the stern gland might be leaking, inspect it while afloat and trace the leakage to make sure that diagnosis is correct. On my dribbling seacock, in a damp corner, the minor seepage is difficult to study but I've taken trouble to eliminate the bolts and the hull seal, so re-grinding the cones becomes the most likely solution.

If a WC pump is playing up, its intake function will be difficult to test in the boatyard, so check it thoroughly while the inlet is submerged.

For owners whose boats have holding tanks, there's another absolutely vital task that must be performed (not merely listed) before the boat comes ashore: flush the holding tank! If you try that in the boatyard you may become very unpopular!



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**ABOVE** Attending to key items right away is the route to launch on time in the spring

**BELOW** Small solar panels are a cost effective and reliable way to keep batteries topped up



**ABOVE** Saloon of a well maintained Contessa 32 – keeping it dry over the winter, with good air circulation, will help to keep it in this condition

at this stage can be easily rectified before the spring and early summer rush. It also means the unit can be properly winterised at the same time.

### Beat the damp

The biggest enemy to a boat's interior is damp, which will cause mould to grow on surfaces including interior woodwork, which is unsightly and difficult to remove. It can also damage soft furnishings, especially bunk cushions, which are expensive to replace. If you have spare dry storage space it may be feasible to take cushions home for the layup period, but that's not an option for many of us.

Instead, airflow is the key to keeping everything in good order. Stand cushions on edge and leave locker and cabin doors open. If it's possible to safely and reliably run a dehumidifier, with the outlet draining into the galley sink, this will keep the interior dry. Otherwise, ventilation is the key to a dry boat. Many are not set up to create a good airflow, so it may help to add extra vents to washboards or leave hatches cracked open if the yard has appropriate security.

It's also worth inspecting the rig before

hauling ashore, including going aloft to look for anything amiss. If problems are discovered, with either standing or running rigging, at this stage they can easily be sorted in good time before the boat is launched.

As Ken Endean (see right) says, the full jobs list needs to be considered before hauling out. And the time to act on any big jobs is as early as possible in the autumn. Even if you intend to do the work yourself, the pandemic-induced surge in boating means some spares are difficult to source and have long lead times. And most marine suppliers revise prices in November, so buying early often means useful savings.

If you need professional help with any aspects of the work, then this is best booked as soon as possible. Even in normal times marine trades are very busy in spring and summer, so booking work in as early as possible during the autumn is a key to getting it done without impinging on next season's sailing.

■ Turn to page 90 for Dick Everitt's Sketchbook of tips on improving airflow through your boat's cabin ➔

# Well tucked up

Boat restoration expert Will Higgs uncovers the deck cover options for boat owners

GUIDE TO  
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winter  
COVERS**

**O**pinions are divided when it comes to the use of deck coverings over winter. Some say the boat is best left uncovered to prevent sweating and condensation. In the past, when it was only my own boat that I was considering, it has depended on the intended maintenance activities for the winter in question. Now that my business, Combined Marine Services, is responsible for the care of many different owners' yachts, we have to consider not only security and protection from the elements, but also accessibility for boatyard work.

Our head shipwright, Matt Bunney, believes that boats should always be covered over winter. Considering the length of time many vessels spend laid up, it's clear that minimising the exposure of the gelcoat to UV will extend its life and good looks by many years. Covers can protect seals around windows and hatches from damage caused by freezing and then thawing. This also applies to the scuppers and general deck fittings. Side decks and other areas are also insulated from constant penetrating damp and standing water.

Covers help keep the boat as dry as possible to maximise available maintenance time during the winter season, while also protecting paint and brightwork and reducing the amount of mess to clean up in the spring.

This year, for the first time, my boat will be snugly nestled under her own bespoke, breathable, fitted cover. In the past, however, budgetary constraints



**LEFT** Scaffold tent with light cover – worked well for a respray as the light was great, but is sadly not robust enough to cope with winter winds

**BELOW** A well fitted full deck cover can protect a yacht from the elements for several years



inspired other more ingenious solutions. A basic boom tent is a good start. Leaving it at least partially open at both ends to ensure a good air flow is important in keeping the damp at bay unless a dehumidifier is available.

This strategy can be further improved by adding a tight line from gooseneck height on the mast down to the pulpit at the bow and stretching a second cover at an angle down between the boom and the forestay.

## Make use of the mast

If the mast is down it can be placed on crutches on deck in order to create a ridge and a larger cover used. I've always found it effective to tie a long line around the hull just below the waterline and then use shorter lengths to tie the eyelets in the cover down to it. This spreads the load across the cover and makes it easy to adjust sections if they stretch or sag. Care must be taken to storm lash the cover to

stop it billowing in strong winds and being ripped off. I find that a diagonal line each way and three or four lateral lines over the top will keep the cover nice and secure.

It's possible to refine this strategy somewhat by adding hoops under the cover. These help to tension it and also add working space underneath. Hoops can be attached at the stanchions, although they must be fixed as low as possible to minimise the strain. I've found blue water pipe and fibreglass tent poles to be highly effective. These can be braced with battens to hold their shape.

If more extensive work is planned and space is at a premium then a tent will offer the best protection. Bespoke tents can be bought at great expense, but it is possible to use timber or scaffolding to build a frame around part or all of the boat and then cover with a heavy duty tilt. In this case, a very strong cover will be required as well as more robust storm lashing.

**RIGHT** a full cover using hoops, allowing for a full rebuild inside – highly effective, has lasted over 12 months

**FAR RIGHT** Scaffold tent with winter cover – double tarped to reduce condensation



# Ruled by weather

Richard Rogers and Alice Sanger on the rebuilders' race against the weather

**I**f we don't do enough of the rebuild this year, we won't finish it next year. We've already lost much of 2020 and 2021 to lockdowns.

And the weather will soon turn, and there'll be stuff we can't do because it's too cold. If they're critical steps we'll have to stop.

The good news is we've caught up well. We're through the stages of heavy machinery, dust, dirt, and just plain grunt. Long ago the engine came out and with it the interior. Everything stuck to the hull and superstructure has been removed: barnacles and oyster shells, antifouling and paint, old tabs of glass, stubborn things like headlining and Treadmaster, and anything mouldy or rotten. Under the waterline she's been faired and painted.

We've restored what you can save from the skip. Portlights and winches; pushpit, pulpit and stanchions; genoa tracks and traveller. We've made handrails, locker lids and an ice box, and fixed the rudder and tiller. Chainplates and bow roller have been refabricated. Much has been refitted, including shiny new hatches on smart new plinths.

## Working in the cold

All of that can be done at any time of year, out in the yard in the sunshine or huddled in a freezing workshop in jumpers and woolly hats.

The big bulkheads went in before the first lockdown, 500ft of glassing to go six times around each side. The long, awkward toe rails are back on and hopefully watertight. What's left is to finish building the interior, and paint and varnish and plumb and wire it. The superstructure is ready for painting.

But the season is ending. While everyone else is hauling out their boats and winterising, we're stressing about what you can and can't do through the autumn and winter. In the cold, fibreglass won't set, and neither will paints, varnishes and glues. We've tried heating the boat but getting it right is hit and miss if you need to ventilate properly.

We have a race against time. The spring will be full enough without us getting behind. There'll be an engine to fit, sails



**LEFT** *Aurora* in the workshop this summer, looking better

UPDATE ON A  
**through-winter**  
REBUILD



**Extensive fibreglass work, like glassing in large bulkheads, is warm weather work**



**Engine box and chart table carpentry will be completed in the winter**

and upholstery to make, and rigging to do.

So, before Christmas we must finish fitting the larger pieces of the interior: especially those that need glassing to the hull. We've one more bulkhead to fit in the galley. It must be done right and strongly because the cooker gimbal will rely on it. We've other bulkheads to make and fit around batteries aft and storage forward, a water tank housing to make and the bones of the heads and a forward bunk.

If we can get that far we can do two things next: mock up the galley and turn it into a workshop at last. We can work much faster then. Secondly, we can use the colder months for carpentry and the first fix of wiring and plumbing.

While others are draining their fluids and



**This bunk-front is glassed-in when warm but the rest of the bunk can be built later**



**The superstructure must be faired and painted before the weather turns**

storing their sails, we must get on. The rebuild is in Essex and we want to sail to our base on the West Coast of Scotland and enjoy! 2022 remains our target for getting *Aurora* home.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Richard Rogers and Alice Sanger** are rebuilding a Morgan Giles 30, *Aurora*, with the help of J-Star Marine in

Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex. They aim to explore cold, remote places and the mountains they find there.

