

# Back on the water

## 10 top tips for preparing your boat

Returning to your boat after lockdown might fill you with trepidation, but these basic checks advised by insurance broker Steve Risk will help ensure your boat's in good condition to start the season

**W**ith lockdown restrictions gradually being lifted, and longer, warmer days approaching, boat owners everywhere are keen to stretch their sea legs.

However, if your boat's been out of action for several months, and especially if access has been restricted, there are some crucial steps you should take before embarking on your first trip of the season.

Even if owners have had the luxury of dry or indoor storage, issues can still arise which could result in costly repair bills and lengthy time out of the water.

Some preventative maintenance will give you peace of mind before putting the boat into water, extend your boat's lifespan, and ensure the safety and security of those on board.

### 1 Carry out engine checks and servicing

Engines should ideally be serviced by a specialist marine engineer each year to help prevent breakdowns on the water. A full service usually includes cleaning and changing of oil filters, greasing gears as well as checking the gearbox oil levels, and the inspection of air filters, V-belt, impellers, anodes and batteries.



### 2 Examine the sails, mast and rigging

Check your sails for wear and tear and that there's no corrosion or damage to the mast. Look out for signs of stress or cracks that may cause issues later. Additionally, wear and tear due to movement of the rig can easily occur when a boat is moored up during the winter, so owners should clean and replace any damaged components as required.



### 3 Inspect skin fittings

Regular maintenance of seacocks will prevent them seizing up (see panel, far right). Seacocks should be washed with fresh, clean water to dislodge any salt and the seals should be inspected for any signs of damage or leaks. Tapered softwood bungs should be tied to each seacock as an emergency plug.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### 4 Ensure electronic equipment is working and calibrated

The radio, GPS, logs and depth sounders should all be working and calibrated properly. Any moisture that has built up over the winter months can harm onboard electronic equipment, therefore it's vital to inspect and test any electronic devices thoroughly for damage.



### 5 Make sure the gas and ventilation system is safe

Gas rubber piping has a service life of five years, and has its date stamped on it. In the event that it's out of date, or has no date on it, the piping needs to be replaced as a matter of urgency.



### 6 Clean the exterior

Thoroughly cleaning a boat's brightwork can help support the integrity of the boat's mouldings, preventing structural damage to windshields or fibreglass. Use a marine-specific cleaning product to remove dirt and mould that might have accumulated over the season. Apply a quality marine polish to finish.



### 7 Clean the interior

You should also inspect the interior closely, looking out for signs of damage, mould or dirt on the upholstery, vinyl and canvas. Clean the affected areas, and arrange for repairs if appropriate

### 8 Inspect safety equipment

It's important to check that lifejackets are safely stowed away, yet within easy reach, and that they're in good condition. Ensure that flares and fire extinguishers are in date, and that liferafts have been serviced.

### 9 Check the cooling system

An inefficient freshwater cooling system can lead to overheating, breakdown and potential engine damage, so it's important to check for any leaks, blockages, malfunctioning thermostats or corrosion, as well as replacing the antifreeze.

### 10 Check your insurance

If you don't have up-to-date insurance, you're leaving yourself exposed to potentially significant costs in the event of an unforeseen incident. A specialist insurance broker will help ensure you have appropriate insurance tailored to your specific needs, as well as providing access to risk management advice to help prevent any potential claims.

## Dealing with seized seacocks

Lack of grease or a build-up of scale from insufficiently frequent maintenance can cause the moving parts of a seacock to bind to the valve's body. A blow with a hammer may snap off the handle, so try running in some easing oil and leaving it to work overnight. Boiling water or a hot-air gun can cause enough expansion of the metal to break the seal – gentle tapping with a rubber hammer may free the valve once these steps have been taken.

Gate valve seizures are usually terminal, and the result of advanced corrosion. The wheel may well shear off if too much pressure is applied. If the aforementioned techniques don't work, it's time for replacement.

Although plastic and composite seacocks are immune to corrosion, they still require maintenance on a regular, preferably annual basis. Actuate the handle and lubricate the seals according to the manufacturer's instructions – they usually recommend a lanolin-based grease.



Keep a selection of tapered softwood plugs handy to seal pipes or holes

## Final checks as the boat goes back in the water

Once your boat's in the water, scamper down below and check for water ingress.

- Check all skin fittings and seacocks for leaks, as well as the engine water pump and any drains. If you have a Deep Sea Seal-type stern gland, you'll need to 'burp' it by pulling back the bellows until seawater flows in.
- Turn off any automatic bilge pumps until you're sure the boat is dry – they'll hide any leaks until the battery dies and, chances are, you won't then be on board.
- A boatyard will plonk your rig back in,

but you may need to tension the shrouds and set up the mast rake. If your mast is keel-stepped, make sure the gasket at deck level is secure and watertight.

- Check your VHF is working. The coastguard gets swamped at the start of the year, so arrange with your boatyard to give them a call once you're on your mooring, or find a friend's boat to hail.
- Give the boat a good run to her mooring under engine and, once the engine is warm, change the oil and oil filters if you didn't do so before the winter.



Lift-in time: have you opened or closed the appropriate seacocks?

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