

# Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Having a minor leak aboard a yacht is pretty much a fact of life. Yet that is little consolation as you turn your cabin upside down to find the source of the latest drip, drip...

Old boat or new boat, power or sail, glassfibre or wooden we all have to deal with the dreaded leaks. And I'm not referring to a poorly maintained vessel with structural issues, springing a leak below the waterline. Not at all. I'm talking about all of us who have boats that we use regularly and take good care of, ones where we pride ourselves on dry bilges, and install rain awnings or cockpit enclosures. Yet all it seems to take is one rainstorm hitting from a slightly different angle, or with unusual intensity and suddenly you notice a brand-new leak you've never seen before.

The down side to sailing in the tropics is that when thunderstorms and rain hit, they do so with astonishing force. It's a lot like being in a carwash, except without the big furry rollers cleaning down your boat at the same time. When rain comes, with an audible roar, it tracks down and along certain things on deck, instantly creating rivers and streams of water. This sometimes causes a new-found leak trickling in from a point that had always proved bone-dry before. Often the culprit for us will be a rope. Rainwater loves streaming along ropes and lines and if you have one dangling in just the wrong place sure enough the drips will start dribbling in.

For years we had a shoddy spot of glassfibre in one of our cockpit lockers and when the downpour hit from a certain direction this allowed the water to seep in. The trouble was that underneath were layers of marine ply, ceilings and headlining of a cabin below so we never knew where the leak would come flowing out from. Water is tricky that way.

It also has a knack for finding just the most awkward and annoying places to get into your boat. I remember checking in on a friend's boat only to find a leak directly above their chart table and nav station. Fortunately, it was recent, just from a freak storm the night before, but it was also near impossible to trace just where the water had been gushing in from. Especially now that it had stopped. Our only option was to clear up the mess and try to layer protective tarps both inside and



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Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at [water-log.com](http://water-log.com)

above deck to prevent further damage until they could get to the bottom of the issue.

Some leaks come about as a result of a regular maintenance interval clocking around again. Re-bedding the chain plate deck fittings on our standing rigging is one such job. It works like an absolute dream... until it doesn't. And the only way to see if there is too much flex in it or if the sealant has deteriorated is by watching the little trickles of water slowly coming in through our cabinetry. Checking your chainplates should be on every sailor's regular watch list but alas some previous owner of our boat thought it was far better to build extensive holly and maple joinery all around these vital rigging components so that they were impossible to access. It meant that we were only wise to any leaks from the deck plate after years and years of historic water damage began to show in the woodwork.

Other leaks are clearly just from lacklustre workmanship. The hatch acrylic that doesn't quite seal perfectly; the sprayhood that was clearly made for only fair-weather; the dorade ventilation funnel that was put on incorrectly, or even a simple deck fitting D-ring that was only screwed in place rather than sealed with 5200. And you don't find these flaws, or trace the origin of the leak for years sometimes. Or else it's a fix that you just never seem to get round to and slap some duct tape over it instead. And there are hidden mystery leaks that still don't make perfect sense to us.

At least these are all freshwater ones. We're far more vigilant about any sign of a salt-water leak of course. We constantly monitor the tightness of our stern packing gland on the prop shaft, and check the hose clips on the foot pumps we have at each sink, as a sudden seawater influx would be a dangerous and scary prospect.

So much so that we alerted neighbours of ours when we noticed their automatic bilge pump going like the clappers when they weren't even on board, which indicated to us they could have a serious leak. However, being a far fancier boat than ours, they simply reassured us that they had remotely turned the air-conditioning on and it was just the bilge pumping out due to condensation. Ah, how the other half live!