

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Maintenance on a yacht is a year round fact of life and the annual haul out and refit is always a big deal – though not without its rewards

Everyone I know who owns a boat tends to think of her as their pride and joy. They reel off various statistics on her as proudly as parents boasting of their kids' performance in exams: "she loves it upwind", "I can get 7kts out of her under spinnaker alone", "mine was solid as a rock in that sea". And much like the dotting classic car owner, relishing the opportunity to cover his beauty in suds and wax, we boaters take similar care in maintaining our vessels, as a matter of critical safety as well as one of cosmetic charm.

So, whether it's every week, once a month, a seasonal or annual round of it, a bit of spit and polish is a principal element of boat ownership. For us, our general round of sprucing up the boat is much like a spring clean in a house or flat. We dust and wipe down surfaces, vacuum and sweep floors, scrub sinks and toilets, and give the deck a good wash down.

The next level up is a less frequent round of meticulous stainless steel polishing, gelcoat buffing and waxing and teak oiling above deck. Chainplate re-bedding is a bit of a fiddley one, as it involves a strategy for loosening shrouds and stays in turn but it's also a very necessary part of keeping your rig in good order. We've exposed these gleaming stainless plates in our saloon, not only for easy inspection and maintenance but in order to celebrate honestly the construction of the boat.

Below deck everything is wooden, a mixture of cherry, maple, teak and holly all vying for attention. The trouble here is that in order to properly give some love to these surfaces, what is called for is a round of sanding and varnishing every so often, which is not all that compatible with full-time family life on board. We tend to tackle this periodic task in stages, prioritising the high traffic areas of our saloon and galley and starting with easy removable objects, like our companionway steps which can be taken out completely, or our washboards.

Convincing our youngest child to fully leave alone any temptingly sticky varnish is no easy duty, and the endless sanding dust beforehand means that this particular job is one best left for those rare times when we de-camp from the boat entirely when she's hauled



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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

out and on the hard stand. Wood has such a beautiful warm glow when it is well-maintained and the whole boat seems to hum with gratitude when any portion of this chore is completed. The only problem is, particularly on a 33 year old boat like ours, no sooner do you sluggishly get round to re-varnishing everything, then the first bit you started needs attending to again.

Other things are more plug and play, like for like, consumables to be replaced. Water filters, engine filters and fan belts, lines above deck and hoses below are all on our seasonal shopping list. Some items, like toilet pumps and 12-volt fans, are clearly not designed with year-round, constant use in mind. And no one wants a squeaky fan or a leaky toilet pump on board!

The big drivers of the boat, her sail wardrobe and the auxiliary engine, receive a different kind

of care. As they are used most often, their condition is also monitored closely. Sail patching, reinforcing, or new UV protecting strips and covers are always tackled as soon as we are able, geography and infrastructure allowing of course. But there will inevitably come a time when there is only so much MacGyver-ing an old 'Franken-sail' can take before you need to cough up and replace it. The same is true of inflatable dinghies and their associated outboards. Whereas a decent marine diesel engine will see most boats through several ownerships. They are forgiving workhorses and the best approach in caring for them is regular filter changes, running them only with good quality oil and fuel, and keeping the engine mounts in good nick.

So add it all together and yes, of course the costs will mount up. Probably more than maintenance on a car but less than on a house.

You won't necessarily see a return on any of this work, but to keep your boat looking good, running well, sailing at her best, and enjoying your experience on her; whether that's one of living aboard full-time or just playing on the water at weekends, it all seems so very worth it to take the time, spend some hard-earned cash and elbow-grease to keep those experiences full of happy sails, purring engines, gleaming wood and sparkling steel as a backdrop.