Ask Dr. Gel

by Dave Weakley

Dave Weakley is the owner of American Boat Restoration and has been keeping boaters afloat in fine trim and good repair for over 40 years.

"Email me or call me with your questions! I'll be happy to help you out"
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Spring into Action!

Here are some helpful tips that I have written for Ask Dr Gel before. Guidelines to get you going on the annual preparation and cleaning projects that are routine rites of spring!

For those new to boating and as a reminder for the seasoned boater I felt it was important to repeat as we get ready for 2020.

Out of storage finally!

Remove the winter cover /canvas or shrink wrap

Once the cold season is over and milder temperatures arrive it's time to pull the storage cover off your boat. March sun feels pretty warm! April and May temps can really heat up the inside of a shrink wrap boat. To prevent mold stains and the smell of gas, it's important to get that wrap off and cover your boat with your canvas or at least slit open areas of shrink wrap very carefully allowing ventilation!

Time to clean

Get out the hose, cleaning buckets and gloves!

Fiberglass boats need to have a good surface protection so that algae, dirt, grime and critters can't adhere to the gelcoat. Spring clean with a good marine "boat wash" or "boat soap" - 3M, Seachoice, Starbrite, Marykate, etc. are brands to consider. They are mild detergents which should not remove the sealer glaze and wax. You can use Spray-nine, Fantastic, or On-Off, etc. They are all good cleaners, won't damage your gelcoat, but they will eventually remove the protection your boat should have such as sealer glaze and wax. The boat will be like a magnet if the defense is removed.

1. Spray and then wash your boat down with your boat wash.

2. Compound the gelcoat using top quality Marine products. See more info about proper compounding techniques further in this article.

3. Apply a good coat of marine sealer glaze being careful to completely cover the gelcoat.

4. Next apply a high-quality marine UV protecting wax.

5. After you apply an ample coat of sealer glaze and wax the boat should not get the stubborn stains and grime.

6. Clean your boat often during the season by using the "Boat Wash" and don't hesitate to wax it regularly throughout the season. Protect your gelcoat like you protect yourself from sunburn

Examine Gelcoat

- ✔ **Check deck and hull for oxidation, gelcoat cracks ,scratches, gashes, airvoids, etc. It's best to repair any gelcoat problems sooner than later to avoid worse problems and more expense down the road.**
- ✔ **Check for osmotic blisters. Repair is highly recommended.**
- ✔ **Reglaze and wax if your hull was cleaned with an acid wash (e.g. On-Off) All the gelcoat sealer protecting properties are gone and need replacing!**
- ✔ **If your boat is going to be in the water all season, consider applying epoxy barrier on hull from the waterline down to help prevent osmotic blistering**
- ✔ **Touch up or replace antifouling paint.**

Hardware check

Tighten screws, nuts, bolts,etc on bow eyes, seating, cleats, ladders, swim platform bolts, windlass, railings, antennas, electronics, windshields, rub rails, engine and transom, biminis, hatch doors, etc

While you are at it clean and polish metal with a good metal polish

Marine Sealants

I often see soaked up and rotted core material in the area of decks, around cleats, floors, transoms, window frames, engine hatch covers, seat bases, under rub rails,hull/deck joints, port lights,etc. If there are any areas of peeling and/or missing sealant it is an invitation for problems. It must be removed and replaced.

Never use silicone! I'm not a fan of it. In my opinion there is no place on a boat to use silicone. It dries out, flakes, shrinks and falls out. Use Marine Sealant, I favor 3M

There is a sealant specific to each application.

Be sure to use the right one for the job. Here's technical info from 3M that will be helpful.

- ***Sealant 101*** – High quality polysulfide bedding and deck seam sealant. Chemically cures to form a firm, rubbery water tight seal. Use above and below water line. Seals between mechanically fastened joints on wood, metal, fiberglass and most plastics. Becomes tack free in 5 hrs and remains permanently flexible. Has excellent resistance to chemicals and weathering, salt water, and stress caused by joint movement.

- ***3M Adhesive Sealant Fast Cure 4000UV*** - Superior UV resistant, remains flexible, use above & below water line. Good for sealing deck to hull joints, thru- hull fittings, window and door frames, deck hardware, etc.

- ***3M Adhesive/Sealant 5200*** - Workable up to 4 hrs, tack free in 48 hrs, cures 5-7 days. No shrinkage remains flexible, won't sag or flow, bonds and seals well. Use above & below water line. Excellent resistance to weathering and salt water. Note- this is a permanent sealant! You could do damage to your boat taking it apart, so use wisely!

- ***3M Adhesive/Sealant Fast Cure 4200-*** General all purpose polyurethane that chemically reacts with moisture to deliver flexible bonds with good adhesion to fiberglass, gelcoat, wood, plastics and metals. Paint-able and sand-able. Not recommended for sealing wood decks. Teak cleaners or sealers may soften it. Forms water tight and weather-resistant seals on joints and hardware.

- ***3M Adhesive/Sealant Fast Cure 5200*** – Tack free in one hour, fully cures in 24 hrs. Seal is exceptionally strong and stays flexible. It retains strength above and below water line. Won't sag or flow. Bonds and seals port holes and deck fittings, motors on fiberglass transoms, under moldings, etc. Note- this is a permanent sealant! You could do damage to your boat taking it apart, so use wisely!

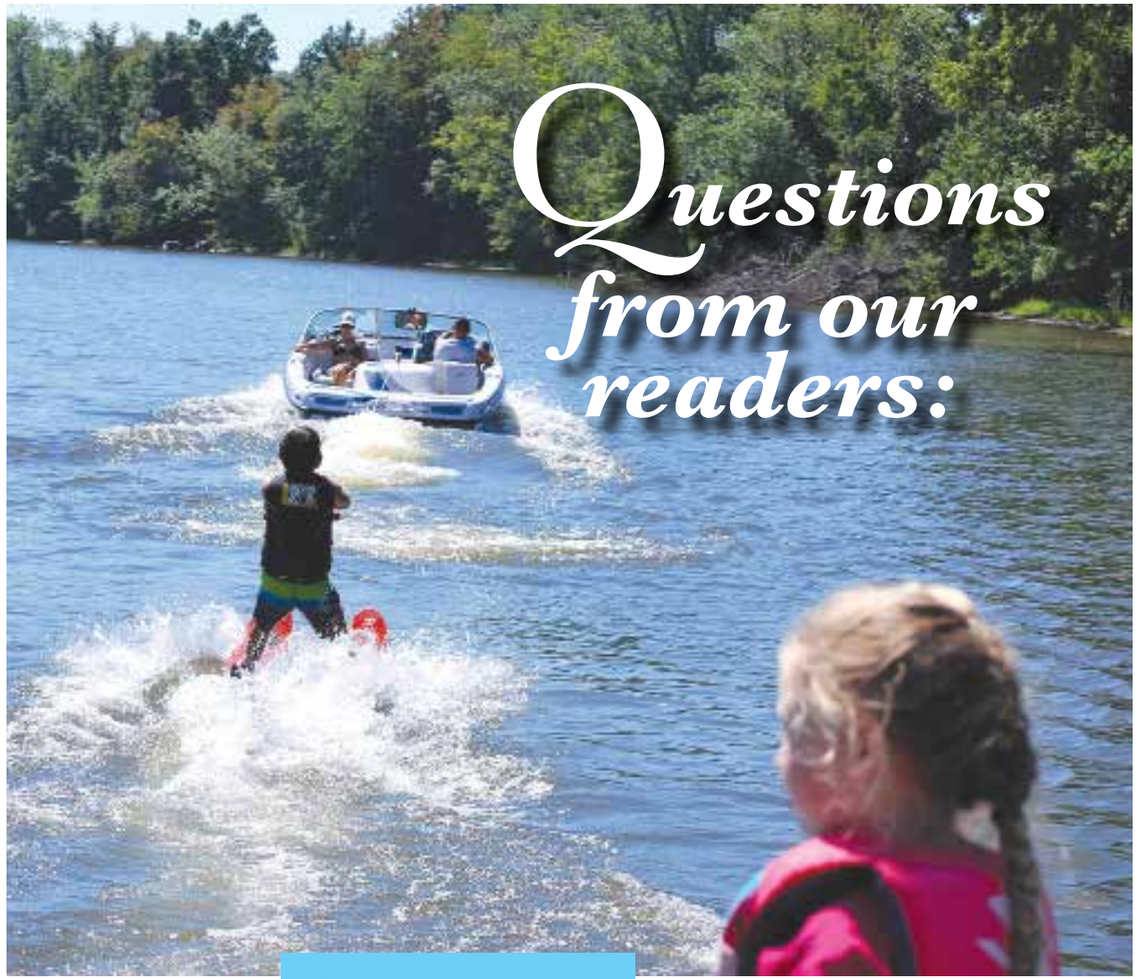
Trailer inspection

Have your trailer serviced by your favorite marina or do-it-yourself. Inspecting and servicing and having it in good condition is easier than doing it on the shoulder of I87. We are currently repairing a beautiful Roth boat that has a 13' long deep gash on the hull caused by a roller that fell off the trailer. The owner was unaware the roller fell off and damaged the boat when he put it back on the trailer. Needless to say the owner was not happy. The damage could have been avoided if the trailer was maintained.

- ✔ Check and lubricate wheel bearings
- ✔ Examine bunks, rollers and pads – tighten loose screws, bolts
- ✔ Check bunk carpet for wear – replace worn out, old, sandy, gritty carpet
- ✔ Clean and lubricate winch- check strap/rope
- ✔ Check hitch
- ✔ Lubricate tongue jack and wheel
- ✔ Test lights and electrical connections
- ✔ Check tire pressure and condition
- ✔ Check surge brakes (if equipped)
- ✔ Check safety chains
- ✔ Check tongue lock
- ✔ Have current registration and inspection sticker

Canvas

Clean and treat canvas and biminis with waterproofing if needed. Repair or replace as needed. Canvas helps protect gelcoat from penetrating UV sun rays.



Questions from our readers:

Email us your questions!
boatrepair@aol.com

Dr Gel,

I compound the boat and a short while later in the season it goes right back to dull again. What can I do to keep the shine?" Ed B. Poughkeepsie, NY

The dullness in the gelcoat goes beyond the surface. Gelcoat is porous and the fade is imbedded in the pores of the gelcoat. When the boat was new it had a sealer glaze that filled the porosity in the gelcoat. It's likely after years of washing the boat especially if harsh chemicals and or dish washing liquids were used the sealer glaze has gone away. Now that the protective glaze and wax is gone the UV sun rays are penetrating the porosity in the gelcoat.

Degrees of fading will vary depending on color; darker colors, e.g.; red, maroon, green, dk. blue all have large amounts of pigment and will fade faster than lighter colors.

"In most cases gelcoat shine and color can be restored!"

If you are not aggressive enough when you compound you are shining only the surface. You need to take the top layer of gelcoat off to get to good gelcoat. It is possible that the right compound materials and technique will fix your problem.

Get good gelcoat compounds. There is a difference between compounds for cars and boats. Generally gelcoat compound is more aggressive than automotive compound. I use the following * TR products - there are others available but I like these. TR-311 is a coarse compound - TR 308 eliminates swirl marks and minor scratches and TR-301 Sealer Glaze closes gelcoat pores and seals. After using the TR-301 Sealer Glaze a good marine UV protecting wax must be applied to insure the longevity of the shine.

Depending on how faded the gelcoat is will determine what compound you can start with.

"If you are going to compound and wax your boat you need the right materials and equipment"

Here's what you need; a good particle mast; compounds dry out your sinus and skin, eye protection and light weight gloves, terry cloth rags, a variable speed buffer, not an orbital buffer! Orbital buffer is good for polishing but not for compounding because you won't get the heat from it necessary to get a shine. Be sure to get a buffing pad; different from polishing pads. Use a good quality wool pad, I use a 3M doubled sided pad. The pads are pricey, but you get what you pay for.

"As a general rule; buffing without a little heat you're not going to get the shine"

Start with using TR-311, course compound. Apply to the boat using a terry rag. Put enough on to keep it moist; too much will sling all over and make a mess. All buffers spin clockwise so put compound on the boat and work right to left in small areas so the compound stays moist and it will avoid loading up your buffing pad. Be careful buffing around registration numbers, vinyl graphics and stripping tapes!

After using TR-311 wipe the residue off the boat. Clean the pad with a tool called a spur. You can use the side of a screw driver but it tends to pull the pad apart. Repeat the process using the TR-308 to get rid of swirl marks and minor scratches caused by the coarse compound. Again wipe off the residue and clean the pad. Next apply the TR-301 Sealer Glaze. It can be applied and removed by hand but for best results use the buffer. Wipe the boat down one last time and apply a good marine UV protecting wax. Wax is essential because the Sealer Glaze does not have UV protecting properties.

If the gelcoat has become badly chalked and it comes off onto your hands and clothes when you rub against it wet sanding and compounding will be required to bring the shine back.

Here is the basic wet sanding process;

I test spot an area starting with a professional grade gelcoat compound. If that does not remove the fade then I will wet sand using a sanding block starting with 1000 gt. During the process the sandpaper is completely saturated with water. If fade is still present after testing with 1000 gt., I will then use 600 gt wet sandpaper. I will not use any coarser paper. I work 1 sq. ft at a time all the way around the boat being very consistent on how much sanding is done. The gelcoat must be sanded evenly otherwise the boat will look like a leopard. If 600 gt is removing the fade, 1000 gt is used next. Depending on finish desired 1500 and 2000 gt is used. Final applications are professional grades of compound mentioned above, sealer glaze and UV protecting wax. Once the gelcoat is refurbished back to a nice shine it is very important to keep the boat waxed!

"Question for you Dr Gel, I pulled my boat out to get it ready for the season. It has a scum line on it that I cannot get rid of. What do you recommend?" Rick M., Catskill,NY

In your case there is a remedy in a bottle.

My first choice of cleaning product is called FSR - Fiberglass Stain Remover (FSR) made by Davis. It is a unique stain absorbing gel that serves a variety of purposes. It is ideal for removing oil, rust, exhaust, waterline and transom stains. This product also works great on shower stalls and furniture made of fiberglass.

Its non-abrasive quality means that it is safe to use on white painted surfaces as well as on gel-coat. Just don't forget to test a small area to be sure FSR will not damage the finish. This product requires no sanding or compounding, and can simply be applied with a brush, sponge or cloth. Wait a few minutes and then wipe or rinse off.

Another hull cleaner is On-Off, an acid cleaner that will strip everything off your boat. It is available at many marine supply stores. It comes in two different forms liquid and a gel. I suggest using the more user friendly gel. The liquid atomizes in the air and can easily get on your skin. If you elect to use the liquid keep the wind at your back, use protective gloves and eye protection! Don't get it on anything but your boat. It is an acid, remember, and will discolor trailers, especially galvanized. After using it according to the directions be sure to rinse the areas thoroughly. Apply sealer glaze and a good coat of wax. Wax is essential to seal the gel coat pores!

"What is the best UV protecting wax to use?" Steve M. Saratoga Lake, NY

There are many great marine wax products available. Ask ten people what they like and you will probably get ten different answers.

I have used many types of boat waxes through the years and the one we feel is superior and use exclusively is Collinite No. 845 Insulator Wax.

Whatever you choose to use just be sure the wax is formulated for marine use!

We all need reminders!
Hope this article was helpful getting the new season off to a great start!

Let's go boating!