

Over 45 Years in Business
“Ask Dr Gel”
 15 Years in
 Boating on the Hudson

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 45 years.



“Email me or call me with your questions! I’ll be happy to help you out”
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Gelcoat is the Skin that Covers Your Boat

Its purpose is to protect the boat and make it attractive.

The summer months of the baking hot sun are upon us and we along with your boat are vulnerable to UV damage by the burning sun. We can apply sunscreen, wear light clothing and hats, sit under a tree or umbrella, etc to help protect ourselves. Boats are out on the water, on reflecting water with limited defense. Think about how much sun they are exposed to.

A Question from a reader -

“Dr Gel can you advise me? My boat has lots of color fade; the color comes off on my fingers and clothes when I rub on it. There are many scratches too. My friends have compounded and detailed their boats, looks great one season and then becomes dull the next year. What kind of compound should I use? There are so many out there. Besides the fade and scratches the boat is in great running shape.”
Dan, Catskill, N.Y.

Dan, compounding alone will not remove scratches in gelcoat. I know products promote it on the can. “It’ll get rid of 800 grit sand marks!” states the label. This is untrue, it won’t. If there was a product available for an easier way I’d be using it!

Most people are allergic to sand paper but that is required to get rid of hairline scratches and oxidation like you are talking about. There are different degrees of oxidation.

I do a “test spot” to determine how deep the oxidation is in the gelcoat, what procedure is needed to restore it and the cost. A “test spot” entails using a good grade gelcoat compound. There is a difference between boat and auto compound. The compound used on a boat is much more coarse and aggressive than what you would use on your car. A good quality grade buffer is a must to use. I use a Dewalt, setting the RPMS at between 600 and 1000. Dab the compound on the boat using a rag. Don’t put it on the pad that would be dumb. You want it on the boat not on you! Use a white wool compounding pad and work the compound vertically, overlapping moving right to left in a 2’X 2’ area. Do not let it dry out. Don’t do in direct sunlight. Remove the residue with a clean microfiber cloth. See what kind of results you get. If it is still cloudy the oxidation is deeper in the porosity of the gelcoat. And it will require wet sanding by hand and with a machine. Your problem sounds serious and will require wet sanding. Wet sanding will take off the top layer of faded gelcoat but it has to be done very carefully and consistently



Transom left shows color restored Gelcoat. Right side show severe oxidation

A waterbug machine is a must to use for wet sanding. I use a Hutchins Model 7544 Water Bug III Random Orbit Wet Sander. I use 6” round Mirka Abranet sandpaper. It will speed up the operation. Start sanding the test area with 1500 grit wet sandpaper. Followed by compounding. How are the results after wiping area with the microfiber cloth? If it is not to your satisfaction wet sand using 1000 grit a coarser paper. After you use 1000 grit, next use 1500 grit to get rid of the 1000 grit scratches and compound again. Do not use sand paper coarser than 1000 grit. If you are not satisfied at this stage your boat will need a professional. If you are happy with the results be sure to remove all the compound residue. Apply a quality gelcoat Sealer Glaze (email us boatrepair@aol.com for supplier source) I recommend using a rotary buffing machine with a wool polishing pad (yellow) to apply sealer glaze. This step is a must! The gelcoat is naked, susceptible to stains, bird drops, etc. and anything can stick to it. The glaze will seal the porosity of the gelcoat. Last step and a must also, apply a good UV protecting wax. The sealer glaze



Gelcoat surface that has been sanded with 1000 grit wet sandpaper and wiped clean with a microfiber cloth

does not have UV protecting properties, it only seals the gelcoat pores. Sound like a lot of work? Well, it is. Each step mentioned requires one more trip around the boat. That's why consistent good maintenance is so important to keep your gelcoat in nice shape. I've seen 10-15 yrs old boats that look like they are brand new because the owners took excellent care of them.

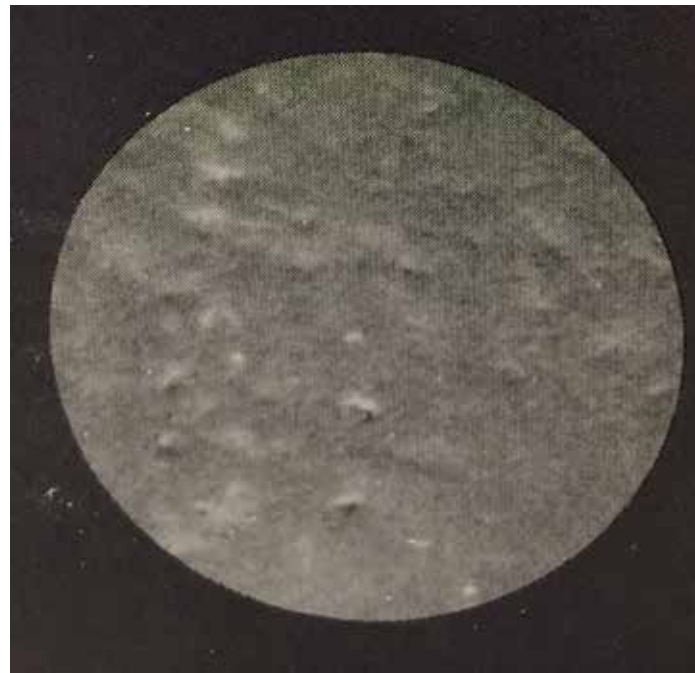
Over time heat and UV rays from the sun will destroy gelcoat on a boat. Polyester, the material gelcoat is made with will shrink and get more brittle and less flexible. When boats are built the gelcoat is sprayed into molds to a thickness of ideally 20 mils. Most boats have enough gelcoat on them to allow for wet sanding. Sometimes the mil thickness measures less than the desired amount which can cause over time what is called print through. One sign that the gelcoat is thin is seeing irregularities if you look down along the sides of the boat. Print through patterns can be visible. Print through is the fiberglass laminate under the gelcoat. If you see print through there's not enough gelcoat to work with. Do not attempt a color restoration.

Some other tips to protect your investment from sun and weather elements:

• **Wax your boat multiple times** during the season. You cannot over wax. Be sure to wash and clean it first before waxing. Remember never use harsh soaps, magic eraser, hull cleaners, dish washing soap or all the protection that's on the gelcoat will go bye-bye. **I use boat or car soap only** to wash my boat.

• **Cover your boat** when not in use. It's best to cover with full mooring canvas.

The cockpit/bow covers are easy to use especially

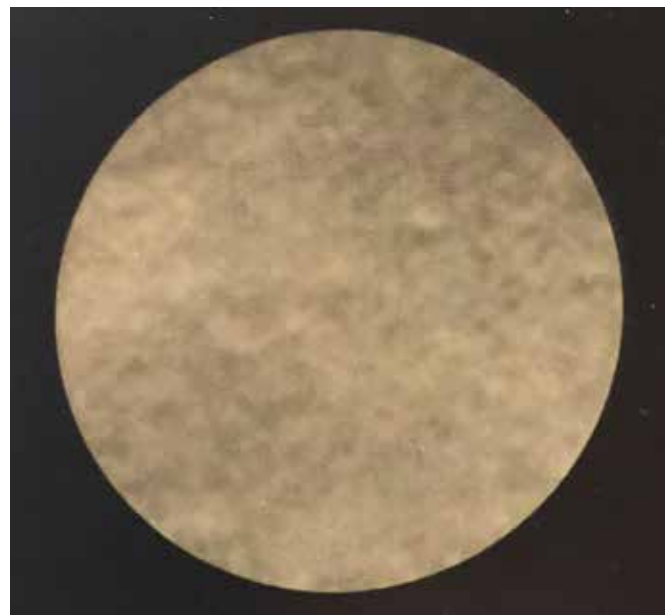


Surface Sealer Glazed

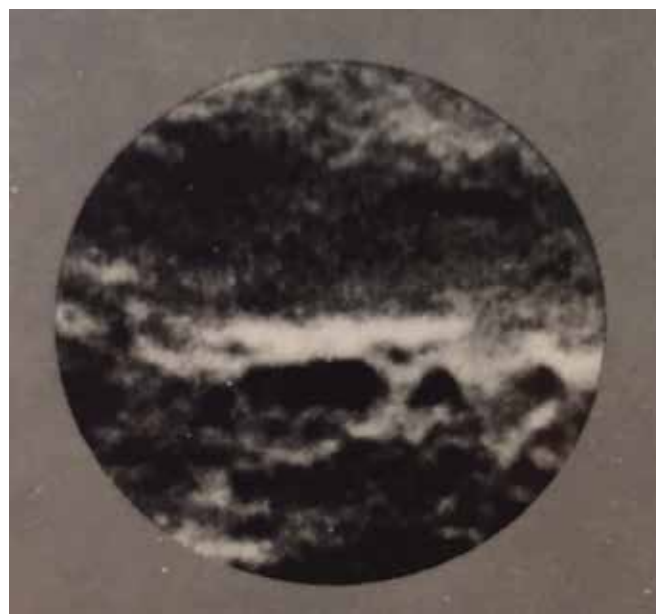
when the boat is in the water but it does not protect the top gelcoat. If you use a bow type of cover you'll notice the fade, staining and dirtiness compared to under the cover over a short period of time. The bow cover often allows some water seepage. Garage works best.

Docking your boat? If possible rotate mooring position a few times during the season so the setting sun will be on alternating sides.

Take the time to protect your boat from the sun!



Gelcoat Waxed



Surface Compounded

Stay Out of Their Way

The Hudson is a working river. Ship traffic cannot see you in time to stop or avoid a collision.

Be Hudson River Paddling Smart

- Always wear your life jacket
- Keep a sharp lookout at all times for larger vessels
- Stay outside the shipping channels when paddling up and downstream
- Always cross the channel behind commercial vessels
- Cross at a right angle, move quickly
- Stay closely together as a group when crossing
- Watch for the ship's wake

WEAR IT!

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