

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 47 years.



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

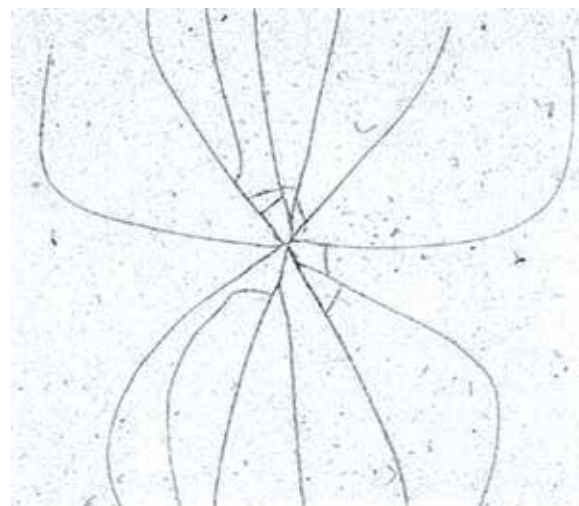
Here's a question from a reader;

Dr Gel, "I am new to boating having just bought my first boat. What can I do to best prepare the gelcoat finish for the new season?"
Todd N. Haverstraw, NY

Gelcoat should always have a protective coating. ALL of it! ALL the time!

Many people don't realize how important it is to keep the gelcoat on your boat in well maintained condition. It is one of the most important things to think about especially below the waterline. The gelcoat surface on a boat is a high quality finish on fiberglass surfaces and incorporates a lot of chemistry, using polyester resin, a catalyst and other chemicals to achieve its strength and water resistant properties. It is a durable surface but has its weaknesses. It is very porous and never stops

curing. Moisture can seep into the gelcoat even if the surface is not broken. As years go by it can become very brittle if it is neglected. The gelcoat is not totally water resistant and sun can bake it. The boat will still float without gelcoat for a while until the fiberglass wicks up water saturating the laminate; I call this water intrusion. Without gelcoat it would also look pretty unsightly. Once water is absorbed in the laminate here are some signs of trouble! Gelcoat could have **#1 - Hairline Cracks** becoming large deep cracks.



"Spidercracks" in Gelcoat that should have been taken care of a long time ago.

#2 - Cracks becoming so loose the gelcoat can be scraped off with a putty knife. **#3 - Little Baby Bumps** that grow

bigger- these bumps are called "Osmotic blisters" I have seen blisters as large as a grape fruit. Most are about the size of a thumb nail. **#4 - A worst case scenario** of water intrusion could be the hull becoming so soft it will not track through the water properly. Depending on how much HP the boat has this could become dangerous. **#5- Very badly faded sun bleached gelcoat.** It is chalked to the point that the color will come off when you wipe your hands on it. It will become brittle, craze and crack. Sun can shrink gelcoat. During a color restoration process I remove decals and registration stickers. The gelcoat under the vinyl is raised, preserved, protected and appears new. It's in direct contrast to the surrounding oxidized surface that was exposed to the sun.

If you do get stains on your gelcoat topside and hull such as algae stains, wine stains, leaf stains, gas and exhaust stains, bird droppings, scum, etc remove it right away with boat soap, water and elbow grease. Having a good coat of sealer glaze and wax will make the cleaning process easier.

In the Spring I have seen so many boat owners doing the annual prep getting their boat ready for the new season. They get out their buffer and compound their boat; slap a coat of wax on it, get it all shiny and think "Hey, looks great! I'm good to go!" A critical important step that most often gets overlooked is applying sealer glaze after compounding. People say "I waxed it, it was nice and shiny but the fade came back quickly". The Sealer Glaze seals the porosity of the porous gelcoat and it must be applied after compounding. The final step should be applying a good UV protecting wax.

Here is important information to know that will help preserve the gelcoat:

The Fall ritual of cleaning the scum off the bare gelcoat hull using any harsh chemicals e.g acid-wash, dish washing liquids, household cleaners will strip any protection your gelcoat may have had. This will make the gelcoat even more susceptible to water absorption. It is essential to apply Sealer Glaze and Wax before it goes back in the water. No ands or buts about it.

Be sure the boat is covered with as much canvas as possible. Full canvas covers. If possible store it out of the sun, under a roof or indoors when not in use.

Buying a new boat? Do your homework and ask what the manufacture warranty is on the hull. "Read the small print" as Manufacturer warranties vary. Warranty from a well known manufacturer stated **"EXCLUSIONS: Notwithstanding anything herein to the contrary, this Warranty does not cover or include: Gel coat surfaces, including but not limited to: cracking, crazing, discoloration, fading, oxidation, or blistering."** There are some manufacturers building new boats delivered with a barrier applied at the factory, and may even include a 5 or 10 year blister warranty. It is important to note that you may have to treat the barrier coat in a specific way to keep the warranty intact, so consult your warranty before you do anything to the bottom of your



Blisters developed from resting on carpeted trailer

new boat. Some companies will cover the cost of applying epoxy barrier on a hull if it develops osmotic blisters. We were contracted by a manufacturer to do this.

I always get calls asking about "bumps" some solid, some broken open on a hull. If you plan on leaving your boat in the water have Epoxy Barrier applied before blistering issue occurs. Then you don't have to worry about harsh chemicals used on the hull. Maintenance is easy; use just a pressure washer and mild cleaner such as Simple Green. Epoxy Barrier is not as susceptible to water absorption as polyesters are. Properly applied Epoxy Barrier will protect your boat for years. Note- Bottom Paint can be applied over the Epoxy Barrier if desired.



Unightly unprotected chalked and faded. Gelcoat



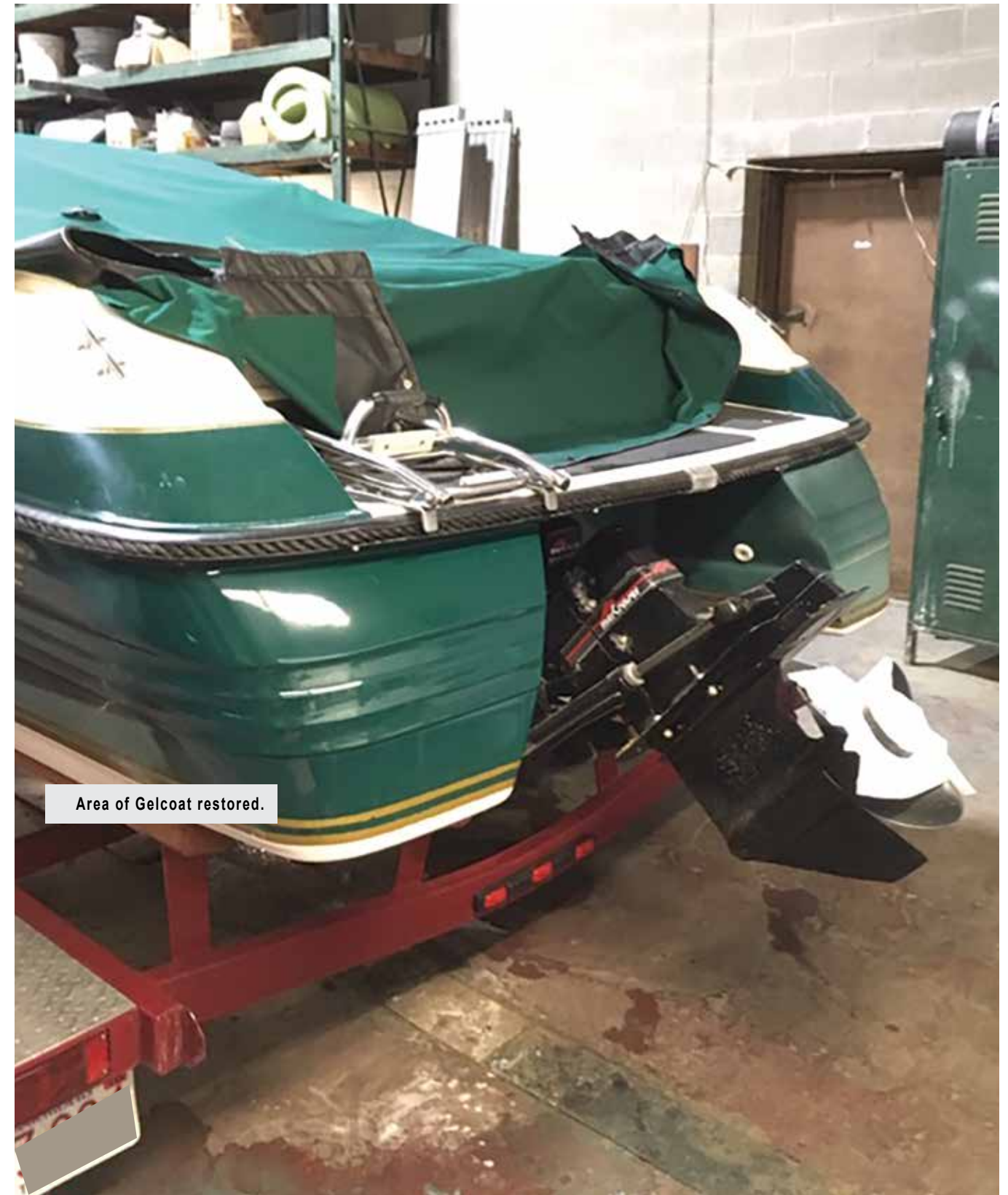
Area on transom tested for restoration.

It's important to know that Bottom paint alone without Epoxy Barrier will not protect the hull and will allow water absorption.

But some boat owners just don't like the look of paint on the hull. The appearance of blisters is much worse and will devalue a boat. Keep the boat on a boat lift or on a trailer. If your trailer has carpet on it I recommend a short nap carpet. A heavy thick carpet that holds more water longer may cause blistering on the hull.

I've written many articles about ***sealer glaze and wax*** and can't stress enough the importance of it. Keep your gelcoat in good shape to extend its life and preserve the value of your boat.

When you put your boat away last Fall were there any gelcoat issues that needed attention and never got repaired? Chances are they did not go away. Schedule your work early and avoid the rush to have gelcoat, fiberglass and other service work done! When the temperatures rise you'll want to be ready to enjoy the water!



Area of Gelcoat restored.

A boat built with polyester resin is the most affordable and lightest. A diligently well maintained boat can look good

and last many years! I can attest to that as I have worked on many older nice looking boats through the years.

Email your questions to boatrepair@aol.com we'd be happy to help!