

YOUR RIG and YOU

The rig often receives less attention than it deserves. The quality of inspection and maintenance of rigging varies from yacht to yacht, but even minimal work will save you money and embarrassment.

Taking standing rigging first, there are common misconceptions about stainless steel wire. The most prevalent seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum:-

1. "Lasts for ever, leave it alone"
2. "Not a patch on good old galvanised, fails without warning"

"Lasts for ever" and "fails without warning" are both incorrect, but refer to a straight fact of life concerning metal fatigue. After a certain number of cyclic heavy loadings, any structure can fail. The higher the peak load, the lower the number of cycles before failure. For the Owner, provided that the rig is set up correctly, fatigue should not be a problem during the accepted 10 season rigging life on a cruiser. Routine inspection should concentrate on checking for cracks, misalignment or distortion of wire terminals, rigging screws, toggles and mast plates. The stays should be checked for any individual strand failures - the most likely place being just in the neck area where the wire enters a swage fitting. For a detailed annual visual inspection, the rigging must be removed i.e. have the mast down. This effectively scuppers the "Leave it alone" lobby. The only routine maintenance on standing rigging is to clean and lubricate the rigging screw threads.

With the mast down (or you up it), check the electrical cables. Look for any chafe or cuts in the insulation, as well as possible leakage paths near connectors. Your alloy mast lives in a hostile salt laden atmosphere. If given a boost from leaking electricity, it can corrode rapidly.

The mast itself benefits from regular dousing with fresh water through the season. For the annual clean, it can be washed with a mild detergent solution. This should remove encrusted salt crystals and most of the surface contamination. Rinse thoroughly, then polish the tube and fittings with copious amounts of liquid wax polish. With the help of an old soft "Scotchbrite" pan scourer, this should remove any stubborn contamination. A final buffing will leave a good protective surface film.

Any moving parts should be lubricated. Modern Teflon or silicone loaded sprays and gels work very well, and should not leave any stains.

Running rigging rarely receives the attention it deserves. Regular dousing with fresh water during the season helps, but a complete annual dhobi is the only way to remove ingrained dirt and salt crystals. If your automatic washing machine instructions fail to mention sheets or halyards, don't panic. Just arrange the controls in an eye pleasing manner (for cool synthetics) and go for it! This can restore sheets to near-new condition - so much nicer at the start of the season before crews have developed calloused hands. If you desire the ultimate in tactile communication with your sails, use fabric conditioner as well!

Setting up a masthead rig is not a "Black Art". The basic requirement is for the rigging to be tight enough to prevent the mast from inducing snatch loads when in a seaway. Having stepped the mast, and set your usual tensions, go sailing. Set the boat on the wind with full sail set, heeling 15-18 degrees. Make small adjustments on each tack until the lee side cap shroud is just going slack, the mast is straight athwartships, and has a slight forward bend at the spreaders. The forestay should have similar tension to the cap shrouds, the backstay slightly less.