



# Don't Start Your Engines Before Your Boat is Ready

BY CAPTAIN VINCENT PICA

Weather, time, and tide are now on our side, so before the season starts, be sure to ready your boat.

As with any project, starting at the beginning is best, and in this case, that's the front of the boat. Open the anchor locker and flake out the anchor rode (the line and chain attaching the anchor to the "eye" in the bottom of your anchor locker) and lay the anchor "on the hard." Check the shackles and the rode for excessive wear and replace or repair, as needed. This will avoid the possibility that the boat will float away one day because the anchor rode wore through or a shackle pin gave out.

Open your storage areas and ensure that personal flotation devices, tools, whistle, flares, and fire extinguisher(s) are all in good condition. With the extinguisher, gently shake it from side-to-side, head over end. You should hear a low "shh..." sound as the suppressant moves back and forth; if you hear a "thunk," the dry chemical has solidified. If an extinguisher isn't "in the green," chuck it (it also makes a good doorstopper).

Check that there is no standing water in the compartment. If there is, the "limber holes" are clogged and water can't get to the bilge to be pumped overboard. This is important to remedy, as every ounce of weight that wasn't on the boat when the boat was manufactured changes its centers of buoyancy and gravity, which just might matter a whole lot in heavy seas.

Move to the cockpit's electronics. Disconnect them, spray them with some "white grease" (it keeps salt out), reconnect, and test. If a connector is corroded, replace it. Don't forget to check your horn!

Check the fuel tank. Is the "sender wire" (which usually runs from the top of the tank to the fuel gauge) in good condition? How about the filter and the fuel lines? Weak or cracked hoses must be replaced, along with rusted hose clamps.

With an outboard engine, change the oil – all the oil – including the oil down in the foot of the engine. Besides oil, you'll need a large straight-slot screwdriver for the two screws



(high and low) that have to be backed out, and a bucket. Find all the grease fittings and gently pump new grease in until it comes out somewhere else, and don't forget the steering cable fitting. Also be sure that the oil dipstick is properly seated.

Just like in a car, make sure the battery and the clamps that attach to the posts are all in good condition. Reset the spark plug(s) in the engine before you put the cover back on – unless you are going to work on the prop (some old models might start up when you turn the prop, and that will definitely ruin your day).

Be sure that all the navigation lights (red and green) are working. If not, take the bulb with you to the marine hardware store and pick up a replacement, plus a few spares.

You're not done if you trailer your boat, as you don't want to be driving along and see your boat doing somersaults along the side of the road! To prevent that, start with the strap that comes out of the winch (connected to the bow eye, it is the first line of defense). Pay out a few feet and make sure that there aren't any frayed or torn segments. If there are, you will need to cut out that entire segment and re-attach the strap. If you aren't sure how, get help from a competent mechanic or dock master.

Take a walk around and be sure the binding straps are all equally in good shape. If not, replace them. Spray the trailer winch and all moving parts with some penetrating oil. Then check the tires and lube the bearings. As with the engine grease, pump it in gently. Who wants to push out a seal?

Depending on the boat, there may be more to do, but if you follow my plan, you're well on your way towards being ready to head out to the bays, the creeks, and even the high seas! ⚓