SEAWORTHY

The BoatU.S. Marine Insurance and Damage Avoidance Report*

Boating On The West Coast

photo: Salim Virji

First, a confession: All of the *Seaworthy* editors have either lived or spent a considerable amount of time on the West Coast. We already knew, for example, that boating in Southern California was far different than Puget Sound or even Northern California. We also knew that the weather on the West Coast was typically pleasant, even in the drizzly Northwest. Finally, we knew that Daniel Webster's quote about the West Coast having 3,000 miles of "cheerless and uninviting coast with not a harbor on it" was liable to compel *Seaworthy* readers on the West Coast to write and set the record straight. And write they did. *Seaworthy* received almost 100 e-mails and letters. On the following pages are some of the quotes and photos, which, taken together, help to paint a picture of what it's like to go boating on the West Coast.

David McNeely, a member in Oak Harbor, Washington, noted that any area has its own unique attractions and challenges. In the April 2006 article in *Seaworthy,* "Venturing Onto The Great Lakes," one of the surprises, at least to those of us who live elsewhere, was the ongoing problem of receiving accurate marine weather forecasts in the area. According to a meteorologist who was quoted in the article, the Great Lakes are at the intersection of large air masses that make accurate predictions difficult and also "create some of the meanest weather in the country."

On the other hand, West Coast readers praised the weather as being remarkably consistent. No problems there. But what is a concern, at least in some parts of the West Coast, are waves, which tend to be significantly larger than waves on the Atlantic, Gulf Coast, or Great Lakes. James Baumgartner, a member in Everett, Washington, notes that the Strait of Juan de Fuca is some 80 miles from the ocean but can still get large swells, especially

Continued on page 6

In This Issue...

MAILBOAT *Letters*

Staying Clear Of Big Ships

As a ship pilot on Chesapeake Bay, I read Captain McGovern's article about collision avoidance with great interest. Close encounters with recreational boat traffic are a common occurrence in any pilotage area. Although a ship may seem to be moving glacially, it is wise to remember that a ship doing 15 knots is moving at 25 feet per second. A ship doing 20 knots will cover one nautical mile in three minutes. Pilots adjust ship speed in accordance with traffic density, but it is helpful for recreational boaters to understand that because of a ship's size, its speed can be very deceiving. Generally, ships are also quiet, and a lack of vigilance can place the unwary into harm's way.

Visibility is a very real problem aboard ships. I advise boaters to look for the windows on a ship's navigation bridge. If they can't see the windows, they should assume that the ship doesn't see them and govern themselves accordingly.

A two-mile CPA (Closest Point of Approach) is desirable, but impossible to achieve in some waters. Recreational boaters should become familiar with the routes commercial traffic ply in their particular areas of recreation, and be vigilant if they find themselves navigating in those areas. Any action taken to avoid a collision should be early and substantial. As stated, Channel 13 is the ship-to ship-frequency. Don't be afraid to use it!

Bill Band
Maryland Pilots
Baltimore, Maryland

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To your six tips for avoiding a collision with a huge ship in your July issue, I would offer a seventh, which works particularly well at night: When there is a light on the horizon whose bearing stays constant, you may break that bearing lock (and avoid a potential collision) by steering directly at the stern of the target. This maneuver works in every case except a situation where the light is directly ahead of you when first noticed, and remains dead ahead. In that case you simply turn left or right to break the bearing lock. I learned this years ago flying jets off carriers and it works the same for boats.

Mac McCarthy
Ocean City, New Jersey

Prop Guards

I just finished reading the latest issue of *Seaworthy*—lots of good info, as always. Regarding the prop guard article, in relatively few words, you captured the history, progress, and complications of the issue and, more importantly, presented the things boaters can do easily to minimize their risks now. One point of clarification: While ABYC has managed the effort, the USCG has "sponsored" and funded the work.

Richard Blackman
Cambridge, Maryland

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Regarding the article on prop guards, your recommendations for preventing propeller accidents were good, but I would suggest shutting the engine off completely whenever a swimmer is climbing back aboard. I had a situation where the shift lever was bumped while I was helping my son board, and the prop was engaged for just a second. Thankfully, I jumped back and shut the engine off in time and he was not hurt. The lesson is to always shut the engine down; it could prevent an injury.

I read every issue of *Seaworthy* and heed the advice I learn from others. Keep up the great work and thanks for providing a forum from which we can all learn.

Lloyd Masukawa
Alamo, California

Overinflating RIBs

Depending on where the RIB is used, the sun could be a factor in overinflation. Here in North Florida, we have to be careful not to overinflate racing marks when they are set. As the sun shines on them, the air inside gets hotter and the marks inflate more. We never lost a mark, but some were close to pulling their seams apart when they were picked up and very hot air came out when the valve was released.

C. Henry Depew
Tallahassee, Florida

Style Vs. Seaworthiness

Your overview of market attractions compromising engineering-design priorities raises many flags, but not all flags. Prudent boat purchasing practice eventually will make a marine survey the norm for significant new boat purchases as well as used boat purchases. This is an educational challenge for BoatU.S. to make part of its narrative on behalf of its boating consumer members. Also:

- Marine surveyors have a valuable "new boat service" to sell, which is overlooked. It may be via a survey or via a pre-purchase consultation. Marine surveyors typically know key details about boats like your candidate boat and have access to related information. Purchasing an hour or two of consultation time from a respected surveyor may be the best expense you will make in planning your purchase options. Indeed, the marine surveyor community could advertise the value and the benefits of such a pre-purchase role with a new level of organization.

SEAWORTHY

Publisher
William M. Oakerson

Editor
Robert A. Adriance, Jr.

Associate Editors
Beth Leonard
Charles D. Fort

Contributing Writers
Caroline Ajootian
Chris Landry

Graphic Artist
Nancy K. Roberts

Proofreader
Regina D. Cruz

Circulation
Nelo Karimi
Kristin Loyd

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- New-boat purchasers have a wide range of owner websites available to learn about what current owners have to say about their boat that you're thinking of buying. Start with a simple web search.

- Read carefully the new boat warranty before signing up to buy. Be clear about what is excluded and conditions for securing performance. If a big-ticket OEM [original equipment manufacturer] item is excluded and left to the OEM supplier's warranty, what is the written procedure to remedy the problem? What if there is a dispute between your new-boat seller and the big-ticket OEM supplier—like a dispute about a defective engine and defective installation causing the problem?

The recreational boating industry is wholly different from the auto industry. The boating manufacturers are typically small, privately owned corporations and are less likely to have their products exposed to public scrutiny. No Consumer Reports here! So buyer beware, including new boat buyers. Do your homework first. It helps keep the terrific eye candy of modern boats in perspective.

Jack Lahr
Annapolis, Maryland

Editor: Another good source for boat buying members is the Consumer Protection Bureau's database, which has over 10,500 complaints arranged by manufacturer. To view complaints, go to: http://my.boatus.com/consumer/searchComplaint.aspx

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Owning two yachts built in the mid-'70s, I can appreciate the difference between a cocktail barge and a real boat. Everyone looks at aesthetics and pizzazz that sell boats. I have dealt with the same issues in house construction. I want durability and maintenance-free finishes. Teak is great if you have money and time. I have two cup holders I made out of PVC pipe for my 1978 Trojan. My 1974 Chris Craft has a hull 3/8-inch thick. Keeping and storing gear and spare parts is most important. When my boat was recently boarded by the Coast Guard, the inspector noted that he had never seen so much gear on this size boat. It would be good to publish "Seaworthy" gear and parts to have on board for certain size boats that go offshore in certain waters! Keep up the good articles for the weekend warriors!

Dean Jarvis
Tampa Bay, Florida

The Seafaringness Gene (There Goes Our Excuse)

I was disappointed to discover that the story about the "seafaringness" gene in "Small Stuff," July 2012, isn't true; it's based on what turned out to be a spoof from March of last year. There is no Mystic University and there is no publication called *Genetic Determination Today.* (See www.genotopia.scienceblog.com/24, "Thalassophilia unmasked").

On the other hand, I did learn that the word "thalassophilia" has been used to describe love of seafaring, and maybe thalassophilia genes remain to be discovered.

Colin Dykes
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Lessons From Members, #1: Engine Trim And Fuel Prime

Several weeks ago I was out drift fishing; every time I went to start my boat to start another drift, I found I had lost my prime and had to pump the bulb. (I have a 150-hp Mercury outboard). I was thinking I had a defective bulb or, worse, a bad fuel pump, but I had just replaced both last season so this didn't seem too likely. After I docked, I got my answer. While I was traveling across the bay in the morning, I had been trimming my engine to get a bit more speed and apparently had trimmed it a bit too far. When I raised it to flush it out, I realized it was too high. I went out the next day and, after my trip across the bay, made sure the engine was all the way down . . . problem solved. Maybe you can share this with your readers.

Paul Coonelly
Long Island, New York

Lessons From Members, #2: Power Cord That Can Help You See In The Dark

Many boating magazines recently have had ads for a Marinco shore power cord with new features, including a "built-in Cordlight that helps you make connections even in the dark!" The ad shows a lighted female end of the cord acting as a flashlight to help find the power inlet on the boat. The problem with this is that, unless the cord has batteries, the shore end is plugged and hot! Having a live cord is dangerous for two reasons. The first and obvious is that it is possible to drop the live end in the water, the second that unless the main breaker is off on the boat, the end can arc when plugging into the boat. This can burn the plug, making it more apt to overheat and cause a fire.

I always follow the safe practice of having the breaker on the dock off before making the shore AND boat connections. Only then do I turn on the shore-side breaker. The LED lights at each end of the cord are a great idea, but encouraging boaters to climb aboard boats and hold the hot end of a 30- or 50-amp power cord is an accident waiting to happen!

Capt. Peter S. Reich
Shelter Island Heights, New York

Aw, Shucks ...

Since becoming a member of BoatU.S. and purchasing towing and trailer coverage, I have not only enjoyed peace of mind but also look forward to getting the magazines. I have been boating for many years but know that I am not a blue-water sailor. All the magazines are top quality and my compliments to all who publish them. But *Seaworthy* has taught me so much on how to keep safe and maintain my boat even though I am not a novice but nowhere near being a real fixer. The pictures and step-by-step guidance and guides to staying safe on the water are so well presented. I keep articles in a binder and reread them. I am an older boater, but how I wish I had joined BoatU.S. years before I did. Please, just pass on my thanks to the editors and all the staff of *Seaworthy*. They do a terrific job.

John Lavin
Sebastian, Florida

ALERT

Overloading Larger Boats

You don't need to be a naval architect to realize that overloading a boat increases the chances of a capsize by raising the center of gravity and making it less likely to recover when hit by a wave. Every boat under 20 feet in length carries a capacity plate within sight of the helm that specifies the maximum carrying capacity of the boat in pounds, the maximum allowable weight of persons onboard in pounds, and the maximum horsepower recommended for the boat. For these smaller boats, a simple rule of thumb is not to carry any more people than there are seats. But even if your boat is larger than 20 feet and doesn't have a capacity plate, there is still a limit to how much it can carry. Powerboats with flybridges can be particularly vulnerable—there were over a dozen people on the flybridge of the submerged 50-foot trawler in the photo when it was hit by a large wake and capsized (Claim #0601022). Miraculously, all 28 people onboard at the time survived.

The passengers on the 34-foot Silverton *Kandi Won* were not so lucky. The boat was heading out of Oyster Bay, Long Island, on the 4th of July with close to 1,000 other boats after the fireworks had ended. A large wake struck the boat, and it capsized, spilling 24 people into the water. Three children who had been playing cards in the cabin drowned. While the causes of this tragic accident are still under investigation, overloading was very likely a factor.

On July 15th, the parents of 7-year-old Victoria Gaines, one of the victims, joined U.S. Senator Charles Schumer in calling for the Coast Guard to set capacity limits for boats over 20 feet in length. Whether the Coast Guard chooses to do so or not, owners need to be aware of their boat's carrying capacity and be careful to avoid overloading; keep weight low and evenly distributed. Make sure the boat has not sunk more than an inch or so below its normal waterline. On powerboats with flybridges, don't let everyone join the helmsman even if it means they don't have as good a view. A variation on the rule of thumb for boats under 20 feet offers some guidance: Don't allow any more people in the flybridge than there are seats.

Zombies In The Bilge

Once your boat is safely on the hard after the winter haul-out, it's a good time to get down on your hands and knees and peer into the dark recesses of the bilge. Hopefully you won't encounter any of the undead under your floorboards like these below-waterline fittings. They may still be functioning, but the vital force has been leached from them. If left to themselves, they could sink your boat.

So how do you recognize the undead? Bronze fittings that have become pitted or developed a pinkish cast may be suffering from dezincification. Green or red streaks running off the fitting, fuzzy white deposits, signs of rust, or valves that do not open and close easily indicate corrosion that can turn seacocks into zombies. *Seaworthy* has addressed both dezinctification and corrosion over the years, but the member photo below had us revisiting the topic.

Two dissimilar metals in contact with one another in an electrically conductive fluid (like seawater) make a battery. The "less noble" metal will be eaten away. Zinc is one of the least noble metals (which is why we use it for sacrificial anodes), but it is used in brass and bronze fittings for several reasons including its viscosity (ability to be poured), ability to be machined, and cost. Brass has a high percentage of zinc (up to 45 percent) and most commercial bronzes have 15 percent or less. A brass fitting that loses a large portion of its zinc resembles Swiss cheese and becomes the undead. With its lower zinc content, bronze does not usually suffer from dezincification. That's why you should only use bronze (or Marelon) for below-waterline fittings. But there are some boat manufacturers who continue to use brass thru-hulls.

So when peering around your bilges after you haul out, look for any below-waterline fitting that has become pitted or developed a pinkish hue (above), the classic signs of dezincification. While dezincification may be a factor in the undead fittings in our member's photo on the left, the white fuzz suggests something more is going on. We consulted metallurgist Mark Bell who, based solely on the photo, suggested the ugly white residue could be corrosion due to too many dissimilar metals combined with condensation on the fitting. "It seems that the stack-up is copper/brass threaded nipple to a brass fitting to a stainless steel valve," he wrote. When this fitting comes off the boat in October, we intend to take a closer look.

Hopefully you won't see anything this ghoulish when you inspect your below-waterline fittings, even if you do it around Halloween. But if you find anything amiss, you'll want to replace the undead with good bronze fittings from a reputable chandler like West Marine before you splash in the spring.

Sniffing Out Fuel System Problems

Everyone knows or should know that a gasoline leak in the engine compartment can be deadly. Gasoline dripping from a damaged hose, for example, would get anyone's attention. But explosions are caused by fumes, which can sometimes come from a hose that looks healthy — no tears, cracks or dripping gasoline. Fuel lines have a limited lifespan and need to be checked at least annually by running a rag over them; if the rag smells like gas, the hoses need to be replaced. It's a good winter project.

Aside from the hoses, the rag test should also be used at the fuel system's fittings and connections. The claim files show that gas can leak where the hoses attach to filters or the engine, so special attention should be given there. Often a hose clamp is used for the connections, but sometimes metal fittings can be found, and they can leak as well — either gasoline or maybe just fumes.

The fitting shown here was probably damaged when it was swaged onto the hose, most likely by a shop, since the manufacturer didn't use this kind of fitting when they built the boat. Any damaged fuel system component — hose, clamp, or fitting — needs to be replaced immediately.

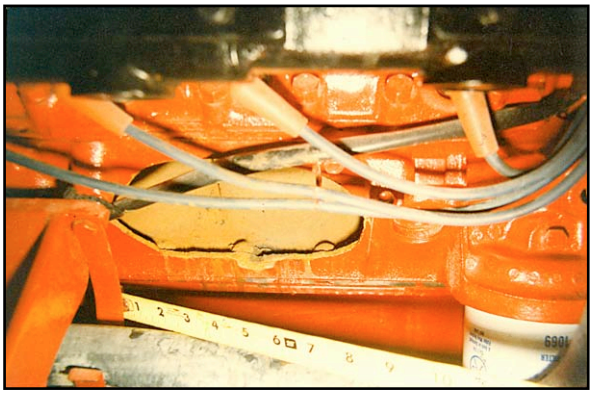
Reading Labels

Do you always take a moment to read labels? Probably not —life is too short for labels. But the next time you reach for your motor oil, it's worth at least a quick glance at the label to make sure what you're putting in your engine is actually motor oil. Putting heavy gear oil, or transmission fluid, or even the wrong-viscosity oil can do damage to your engine, maybe serious damage. Likewise, filling your transmission or lower unit with the wrong lubricant.

The containers on the left are obviously different, with clearly different labels. But the ones on the right look almost identical and it would be easy in your rush to get the oil changed this fall to make an expensive mistake. To make matters worse, the easily recognizable labels were introduced overnight to the nearly identical ones, so anyone who was used to the old style might not pay close attention and could easily pour from the wrong container.

The Winter Of Your Engine's Discontent

The method to winterize an engine varies depending on whether the engine is fresh water or raw water cooled, as well as a number of other factors. In fact, it's not possible to generalize on the procedure other than to say that water needs to be drained out of places that could be damaged if it freezes. Some engines have a single drain plug while some have several; miss just one and you can ruin your engine. One boat owner winterized his new inboard/outboard by following the procedure in the manual that stated he needed to remove three drain plugs. Unfortunately, the manual also had a procedure to drain the engine if it was equipped with a different drain system, which it was. That procedure required removing *five* drain plugs. The engine block was cracked over the winter and had to be replaced. Make sure you check your manual if you're doing your own winterizing and double-check that the procedure for draining the water is the right one for your engine.



An alternative is to run non-toxic antifreeze through the entire system via the cooling water intake. This has the added benefit of inhibiting corrosion over the winter. For more on winterizing, visit: http://www.boatus.com/seaworthy/winter/default.asp.

ON THE WEST COAST, *from page 1*

on an outgoing tide when wind is being funneled between the mountains. (His advice was to plan ahead.) Other members mentioned the Farallon Islands tragedy this past April, where a 38-foot racing sailboat was trapped by a series of large, breaking waves and driven onto a rocky island. Five of the crew died.

Below are some of the quotes from members that paint a picture of boating on the West Coast. We've also included an account on page 8 from George Phillips, a member in California, about an experience he had anchoring in a harbor he thought was protected. Instead, large waves began wrapping around the point. It's a good story.

Two other West Coast accounts are published at our website, www.BoatUS.com/Seaworthy. The first is a terrific description of boating in the Pacific Northwest by Missy Watts, who moved to the area from Georgia. The second is a harrowing (and humorous) account by Ralph Ahseln of a near-fatal encounter with waves at the Columbia River bar. In the coming weeks, all the stories will be put on the site.

Photo: George Phillips

Stillwater Cove

Waves

Southern California

"Wind and waves conspire to give Point Conception its reputation as 'The Cape Horn of the Pacific.'"

David Jennings, Kings Beach

"We nearly always have good-sized swells. This, combined with the [wind-generated] waves, means that calm seas are a rarity. The swells come from the vicinity of New Zealand in the summer and Alaska in the winter. Often it is a combination of swell direction, which makes for a bumpy ride. These lumpy conditions are not for everyone."

Paul Gross, Manhattan Beach

"Crossing the bar at the entrance to Ventura can be exciting and quite dangerous. I recall a time when a big swell was running and some friends failed to follow me out of the harbor. Later they explained that they saw the bottom of my boat's keel as I was going over a wave and they decided to stay in the harbor. They were right; I made it home that day, but it was damn scary."

George Phillips, Ventura

"As soon as I was on deck, a nice young man on a surfboard identified himself as a lifeguard and informed me that I had drifted very close to shore. I looked toward shore and was greeted with the sight of four-foot breakers forming less than 20 feet from my bow. I quickly thanked him and moved over a mile offshore. I later realized that what I had failed to notice was that after I had rounded Point Dume, the cross-shore breeze had become an onshore breeze. By the way, there are fewer lifeguards now because of budget constraints."

Ted Fautz, Los Angeles

Northern California

"What a rude awakening when I began to plan for coastal trips out of [San Francisco Bay]. Every harbor was a day's motor away with no guarantee of being able to access it once I arrived. Sea conditions and shoaling could easily prevent entry."

Steve McCormick, Winters

"The Golden Gate can be a very dangerous place for small boats due to the strong tides and large swells. Once you're inside, though, it's one of the best sailing places in the world."

Ken Muther, Morro Bay

Pacific Northwest

"I figured that if we had wandered into Clatsop Spit [at the Columbia River bar], we'd just die. A kind of calm came over me, even though I was really scared. I sat in the cockpit hanging on, watching breaking waves that towered over our boat, which pitched up and down like a teeter-totter, at times going almost vertical."

Ralph E. Ahseln, Camas, Washington

"He got the boat turned around as I was reeling in the lines. I told the two ladies in the boat to sit down on the bottom and put on their life jackets. Bruce and I put on our life jackets and then I helped spot as we headed back in. The waves were higher than a house! They were standing waves like you'd find on a white-water river, only the river was the mighty Columbia. (If you think "mighty" is an overused term, you've never been over the bar during an ebb tide.) The Coast Guard came out to keep watch on us as we struggled in."

Brian M. Godfrey, Oregon City, Oregon

Photo: Bob Klawuhn

San Francisco Delta

Cruising

Southern California

"Most of the West Coast is also 'deep water,' which relieves some of the navigational anxiety that can be experienced on the East Coast. I have never run aground here."

Captain Tony York, Long Beach

"Three characteristics of the L.A. area are: Watch carefully for merchant ships; wind comes up at 1 p.m. and goes down at 6 p.m.; moorings can be scarce at the few harbors."

Edward Bailey, Los Angeles

"When Southern California sailors talk about 'long voyages,' the two most frequent destinations are Catalina and Mexico. There are two annual cruises from Southern California to Mexico: the Baja Ha-Ha and the Newport-to-Ensenada Race. Many boats race down, party, and then slug their way back."

Arthur Grant, Mission Viejo

Northern California

"We have had our boat for 35 years and have only missed a few years when we did not take our vacation into the Delta. When we get there, our routine is to break out the water toys: kayaks, dinghy, water mattresses, and tubes. We usually stay there for a week or more. It is very relaxing."

Bob Klawuhn, Los Altos

Pacific Northwest

"We've boat-camped on the Columbia and Snake Rivers at marina campgrounds along their 400-mile expanse from Portland, Oregon, to Lewiston, Idaho. We worked our way through locks at eight dams with lifts of more than 80 feet and had great adventures with a wonderful variety of country along the way. And when we moved into saltwater, there were even more boating opportunities."

Richard Sandaas, Seattle, Washington

"One thing about the Northwest is the lack of crowds. If there are more than four boats in an anchorage, I feel encroached upon. When we visit an island or inlet, we find Indian folklore, hieroglyphics, old miner's cabins, waterfalls, and quaint villages. Another wonderful thing about the Northwest is, you can't see it all. That means there are always places to go that you have never seen before."

Dave McNeely, Oak Harbor, Washington

"Transiting the coast is only feasible for recreational boaters who have seaworthy vessels with enough range to travel between our few ports. I would recommend at least a 200-mile range with fuel left over for emergencies. Summer winds are almost always northerly and blow at 15 to 20 most afternoons. Winter winds are mostly southerly, and don't even think about traveling by water."

Michael Gibbons, Coos Bay, Oregon

Photo: Dave Shively

Columbia River

Weather

Southern California

"I consider myself a solid 'B'-grade fisherman with a good amount of experience. I've never seen fish so finicky about the quality and presentation of bait as we have here. HOWEVER, the weather is predictable and there are no mosquitoes."

Steve Black, San Diego

"San Diego wins the weather debate, hands down."

Steve Saah, Solomons, Maryland

"Let me share these two thoughts: 1. Our weather allows for lots of good boating days. 2. Hurricane season? Never heard of it."

David Riggs, Long Beach

Northern California

"We can sail 12 months a year here; we don't have ice. We prefer our ice in our drinks, not in the water. Also, there is no humidity. We prefer our water in the water, not in the air."

Van Tunstall, Aptos

Pacific Northwest

"The rain is light and not heavy as it often is in Florida. I have rain gear onboard but I can't think of when I last put it on. All one needs is a jacket and some sort of hat."

Les Blackwell, Bellingham, Washington

"I was spending the night on my boat in the marina the other night when a thunderstorm blew through. My fellow boaters at the marina were hooting and hollering and celebrating with each lightning flash and clap of thunder like it was the Fourth of July. I have never in my life seen people so enjoy a storm. And why not? Here in the southern reaches of Puget Sound, we hardly ever experience thunder and lightning."

Missy Watts, Olympia, Washington

Lifestyle

Southern California

"Marina del Rey is broken into numerous marinas, guest docks, slips, and anchorages. Depth is good, services are available and there are no less than eight yacht clubs. Celebrity sightings are common."

Arthur Grant, Mission Viejo

"On the foredeck was a woman waving her arms in my direction. Assuming they were in trouble, I cranked up the motor to see if they needed help. When I got within hailing distance, she shouted, 'Have you got any taco sauce?'"

George Phillips, Ventura

"Advantages: no spiders to clean off the boat; Catalina Island; 12 months of boating;

Photo:Gareth Jones

Channel Islands

celebrity sightings at the dock and on the water; and sea lion sightings everywhere."

Patrick Hynes, Manhattan Beach

Northern California

"A transition from the Bay, the Delta offers miles and miles of laid-back boating—fishing, swimming, and berry picking, and a place for raft-ups and barbecues."

David Jennings, Kings Beach

"The Delta is far from cheerless and uninviting. The temperatures are perfect, there is wildlife everywhere, the water is warm, and the people are great. And San Francisco Bay is one of the best [bodies of water] in the world. The nicest thing about the Bay is that whatever kind of wind you want, it's someplace on the Bay. The strongest is usually in the central bay, near San Francisco. North and south of that, the winds are usually lighter. If you want to just drift around, duck behind one of the islands or headlands."

Bob Klawuhn, Los Altos

Pacific Northwest

"The air that drifts off the islands smells sweetly of warm pine and cedar. The aspect that greets your eye is almost exactly the same, in most cases, as it was hundreds of years ago, when Native Americans plied these waters in dugout canoes."

John Vigor, Bellingham, Washington

"The town of Port Townsend lies along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the entryway into Puget Sound and the city of Seattle; we stay there overnight while fishing for halibut and salmon. If you ever stay in the marina,

Continued on page 8

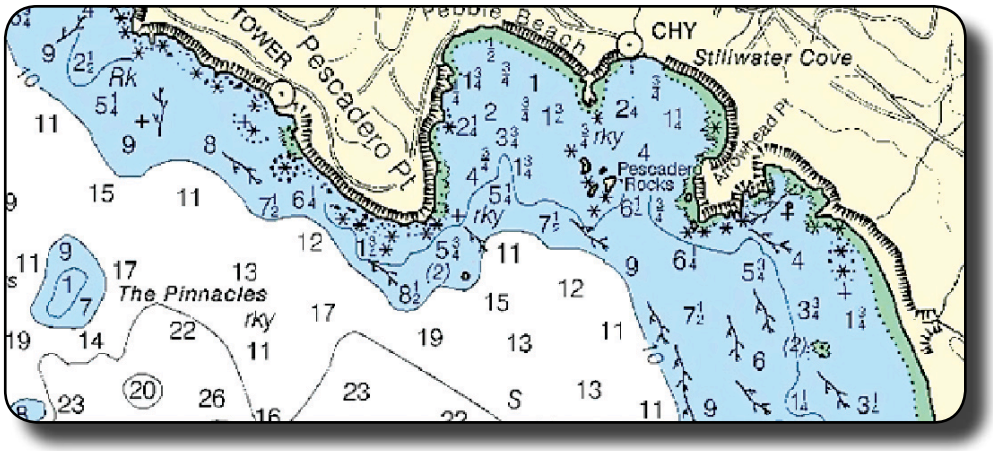
A Swell Story

Any surfer can tell you one way the West Coast is unique: Average swell heights are significantly higher than on the East Coast, the Gulf Coast, or in the Great Lakes. As this story from a reader proves, that swell can be deadly.

By George Phillips

The six-foot comber slammed against the port bow, knocking my 34-foot trimaran sideways until it fetched up on the anchor chain with a jerk that nearly took me off my feet.

A scant quarter-mile behind me, enormous waves crashed against the rocks of Pebble Beach at the head of Stillwater Cove, shooting spray 40 feet into the air. I needed to leave—now—while I still could. But I was alone, and there was no way to manually crank up the 200 feet of chain that held me against the assault of the relentlessly growing waves. I had no choice. I released the windlass clutch. The remaining chain roared out until it fetched up against the rope tail that secured the bitter end. I tied an orange fender to the chain, then watched the incoming wave train, waiting for what



With a forecast for a northerly swell, I thought I would be completely protected in Stillwater Cove. I wasn't.

I hoped would be the right moment. I saw my chance and touched my knife to the bar-taut line. It exploded in two, and I raced back to the helm.

I slammed the throttle lever all the way forward and pointed the bow toward the next comber, praying the prop wouldn't foul on one of the thick patches of kelp

Continued on page next page

ON THE WEST COAST, *from page 7*

Photo: David Stevens

beware of river otters! They are smart, agile, and not afraid to steal your catch of the day. They will climb onboard, open your cooler, and swim away with your prized salmon while you are standing there scratching your head, wondering what the blur was."

Michael Karbowski, Los Altos, California

"The trees are towering, the ferns are the size of my car, the crabs are the size of my head, the shrimp are prawns—the whole of the coast is reminiscent of the megafauna of the Pleistocene period even today. It's my home now, but my breath still catches at the scenery some days."

Missy Watts, Olympia, Washington

"[The sea otter] was lying on his back, clutching to his chest a fair-sized crab, and trying to take bites out of it. But he was surrounded by half a dozen large seagulls, all floating on the surface, jostling each other, pecking voraciously at his crab and trying to wrestle it away from him. Time after time, he would submerge with his meal to get rid of the gulls, but he couldn't stay under for long; as soon as he reappeared, the birds would fly over with great squawks of indignation and continue the assault with their strong, sharp beaks."

John Vigor, Bellingham, Washington

"If you write about the Northwest, please warn people not to cruise here: The orcas are a monstrous size and eat fiberglass and aluminum; the weather is awful—no sunshine ever; and you can walk from California to Vancouver on the floating logs. That's my advice."

Dennis McMurtry, Vancouver, British Columbia

A SWELL STORY, *from page 8*

surrounding me, nearly invisible in the foam and spray. Time slowed to a crawl. The growl of the breakers became strangely muffled. I hung on and held my breath as the bow rose skyward and the steering wheel rotated down into my gut. This was the critical moment. If I made it over the top and down the backside of this wave, I'd be out of the trap. If the boat broached or the prop fouled, I would toss out the anchor I had laid out on deck and pray it held. If not, I'd be hurled sideways into the maelstrom and the rocks behind me. Neither the boat nor I would survive the pounding.

How had I gotten myself into this situation? Through a series of prudent actions and good decisions—and three critical mistakes.

It had all started four days earlier as I was bashing my way up the rugged and desolate Big Sur Coast of California. NOAA weather radio was warning that a major Alaskan storm was generating swells that could reach 21 feet or more, which were expected to hit the California coast by the next day. No problem, I thought. I'll just find a well-sheltered anchorage that faces south, directly opposite the expected swells out of the north. I studied my charts and found what seemed like the perfect spot. Even the name was perfect: Stillwater Cove. It was a south-facing cove well inside west-facing Carmel Bay tucked under Pescadero Point. As a bonus, it was surrounded by some of the most beautiful and expensive real estate on the planet: Pebble Beach. I remembered being there before, and the water had been like glass. Yes, it was only 10 to 12 feet deep, but my trimaran drew four, so depth wouldn't be an issue.

That was mistake number one.

Because I knew that when waves break when they "trip" on the bottom, I anchored in the deepest spot in the cove "just in case." But I didn't really expect swells coming from the north to bend around 180 degrees and enter the cove.

That was mistake number two.

As the big swells began to arrive off the coast, an only slightly smaller swell wrapped around Pescadero Point and found its way into Stillwater Cove. Although conditions were getting rougher, I remained smugly self-congratulatory as four- to six-foot waves began to curl and break on either side of me, but not in the deeper spot I had selected.

That was mistake number three.

During the next couple of hours, the gap between the rows of waves breaking to port and starboard began to narrow. The breakers gradually closed in on me like the moving walls of some demonic medieval dungeon. By the time I had woken up to what was happening, I was in a very precarious situation.

The swells had become so large that they had the effect of the tide rushing in and out every 30 seconds or so. Waves and breakers formed in all shoal areas, regardless of how sheltered they seemed or which way they opened to the sea. In normally very secure Santa Cruz Harbor, some 50 miles to my north, boats and even docks were being swept away by three-foot breakers plowing through the narrow main channel of the harbor like a tidal bore.

The deceptively named "Stillwater Cove."

And so I was left with no choice but to prepare a second anchor and rode for quick deployment, cut my primary anchor rode, rush back to the helm, shove the throttle forward as far as it would go, hold my breath, and hang on while the bow rose toward the sky, praying we'd make it over the first wave.

After what seemed an eternity, the bow started settling back down toward the horizon. As the passing wave kicked up the stern, my breath burst from my lungs with relief. I'd made it. Well, so far, anyway. I still had to avoid the kelp waiting to ensnare my prop and make it to a safer shelter. But I'd made it!

So, where do you find safety in circumstances like these? It may seem counter-intuitive, but in the absence of strong winds, shelter from large swells lies in deep water, even offshore. Once I extricated myself from the dangerous breaking waves in the shallow cove, I simply re-anchored in 60 feet of water, ironically, in a more exposed part of Carmel Bay. Because there was little wind, the openness of the anchorage wasn't important. What was important was that the depth was nearly three times the height of the swell. And because I had already prepared the rode and anchor, all I had to do was drop it over the side when I got to a safe place. Well, at least I got one thing right.

Thirty minutes after I almost lost my boat—or worse—I was riding gently up and down with the big swells rolling into the bay. I was safely anchored less than half a mile from the scene of my recent narrow escape. In the three days I had to wait for conditions to allow me to return to recover my abandoned anchoring gear, I had plenty of time to contemplate the lessons learned from this terrifying experience.

Even though I consider myself an experienced and knowledgeable sailor, I still fell into the common psychological pitfall of associating safety with shelter near land. It's hard to resist the temptation to head for a cozy spot that snuggles up to the beach in the back of a cove. It looks sheltered, and it makes getting ashore easy and convenient.

Continued on page 10

A SWELL STORY, *from page 8*

But if things get nasty, it's the worst place to be. Not only will the waves break first in the shallow water near shore, but you have almost no margin of safety if your anchor drags or you need to make a quick exit like I did. Now, unless I'm absolutely sure the weather will remain settled, I drop the hook in the deepest water that is still sheltered from the prevailing wind and waves.

I also underestimated the ability of big swells to wrap around land. I knew that waves refract, or bend, around islands and points of land, but I never thought that even large swells could do a 180-degree turn. As a result of this experience, I've learned that when swells are large enough, the effect is almost tidal, and shallow water is hazardous regardless of the relative direction of the offshore swell.

Finally, I should have seen the error in my choice of anchorage much sooner and left before it became a life-and-death situation. Much like deciding when to reef, the time to leave a potentially dangerous anchorage is the first time you think about it. Unfortunately, I let my pride cloud my perceptions and my judgment.

Still, I must have done some things right or I wouldn't have made it out safely. I did have the sense to monitor the weather daily and seek shelter based on NOAA warnings. I just picked the wrong spot. Because I had adequate spare anchors and rode onboard, I wasn't reluctant to abandon a set of gear in order to make a quick exit. Equally important, because I had rigged a length of rope to the bitter end of the anchor chain, I could cut it free in an instant. Before doing so, I had readied my large Northill anchor that I knew would set quickly even if it encountered some kelp. I had carefully flaked the rode on deck so that it would pay out with no chance of fouling and made sure that all I would need to do in case of emergency would be to toss the anchor over the bow. Because I had enough line, I could safely re-anchor in deep water. In fact, I needed more than 300 feet to achieve 5-to-1 scope in an average of 60 feet of water. Finally, when things calmed down, I was able to recover my costly anchoring gear because I had attached a large round, orange fender to the end of the chain before I cut it loose. So, thanks to good preparation and some luck, I had survived a close call.

A few days later, I decided to celebrate my narrow escape with a steak dinner at one of Santa Cruz's finest oceanfront eateries. Savoring a glass of fine California Cabernet while surveying the damage to the harbor through the window, I realized just how very lucky I was that my lesson hadn't cost me much, much more.

Staying Safe Where Big Waves Meet Shallow Water

Wind generates waves, but waves often outlive the wind that spawned them to become swells. Since the prevailing winds and most storm winds in the temperate latitudes come from the west (with the notable exception of the East Coast's infamous nor'easters), the West Coast of the U.S. is normally a lee shore, open to the full fetch of the Pacific, while the East Coast is, most of the time, a protected shore. It should be no surprise, then, that the list of the 19 biggest wave sites in the world on the surfing website Extreme Horizons (http://www.extremehorizon.com/surf-shop/big_waves.htm), includes six locations along the West Coast. Hawaii can claim only four and Australia just two.

To get a feel for the difference in swell between the left coast and the right, take a look at the NOAA's National Data Buoy Center (http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/). Click on one buoy on each coast and read the significant wave height (the average of the top one-third of all waves over the interval). To be a bit more scientific about it, *Seaworthy* averaged all of the significant wave heights taken at one-hour intervals throughout 2011 from Station 41623 off Mendocino, California and Station 44009 off Cape May, NJ. Waves average 3.7 feet off Cape May, less than half the 8.4-foot average off Mendocino. The table summarizes data farther offshore, from Buoy 46006 located 600nm southwest of Portland and Buoy 44004 located 150nm east of Cape Hatteras. Combined wind and swell is never less than 3 feet off the West Coast and exceeds 12 feet almost a quarter of the time.

While a large swell rarely causes more than discomfort (and involuntary feeding of the fish) in deep water, in shallow water it can produce dangerous, breaking waves capable of capsizing even relatively big boats. So what does this mean for boaters?

First, when navigating in a swell, do not enter water shallower than 2.5 to 3 times the total swell height. The US Sailing panel that investigated the loss of the Sidney 38, *Low Speed Chase*, and the death of five of her crew in the Farallones Race found that the vessel crossed a 28-foot shoal with a forecast for swell of 12 to 15 feet and wind waves of 3 to 7 feet. In that depth, combined sea and swell that size will produce a breaking wave capable of capsizing a 38-foot boat several times an hour. Be prudent and steer wide.

Second, when choosing an anchorage to weather extreme swells (in excess of 20 feet), look for protection from the swell direction and avoid anchoring in shallow water. As George Phillips' article illustrates, very large swells will refract around points of land, changing speed, wavelength and direction. Anchoring in water depths 2.5 to three times the combined swell and wave height (and carrying enough rode to do so) is good insurance just in case the swell finds its way around a corner to you. Call the local harbormaster, if there is one, and ask where you'll be safest given the forecast. Most harbormasters know how swell from different directions and of different heights will affect the anchorage, and they are all too happy to assist.

Comparison of significant wave heights* on East and West coasts

Buoy	Location	Percent of time waves <3 feet	Percent of time waves >12 feet
44004	~150 miles east of Cape Hatteras	7%	10%
46006	~600 miles SW of Portland	0%	23%

*Average of biggest one-third of all waves recorded during time interval

Raising Awareness About Electric Shock Drowning

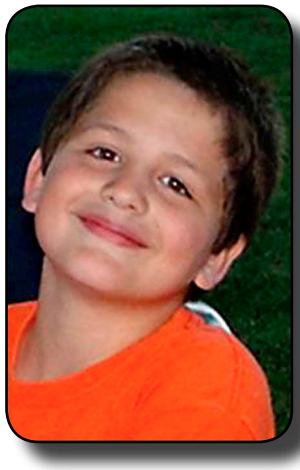
Parents who would never consider allowing their child to go swimming without a life vest will often have no qualms letting a child jump off an energized dock into fresh water.

Conscientious parents, who would never imagine letting their children go boating without a life vest or ride in a car without securing their seat belts, often have no qualms about letting a child jump off a dock into fresh water. What these parents don't realize is that if the dock has120-volt AC power, lethal amounts of electricity could be finding their way into the water from faulty wiring on the dock or a boat. In a one-week period this past July, four children and one young adult were killed in separate electric shock drowning (ESD) incidents at docks on freshwater lakes.

• At a marina on Cherokee Lake in Tennessee, a 10-year-old boy died instantly and his 11-year-old friend was critically injured and died the following day after swimming near a docked houseboat. Frayed wiring near a metal swim ladder on the houseboat was believed to have been the cause. Five adults who tried to rescue the boys were also affected and there likely would have been more fatalities had someone on the dock not had the presence of mind to disconnect the houseboat's shore power cord.

• At Dry Branch Cove on Lake of the Ozarks, a 26-year-old woman was electrocuted and died while swimming from a private dock that, according to preliminary police reports, had faulty wiring. Her two half-brothers, ages 11 and 13, felt a tingling and were saved when they swam toward a different dock.

• In a separate Lake of the Ozarks incident, an 8-year-old boy and his 13-year-old sister both died while swimming from a dock that was also reported to have "improper wiring."



Eight-year-old Brayden Anderson was electrocuted on the Fourth of July while swimming from a dock at Lake of the Ozarks. His 13-year-old sister Alexandra was also an ESD victim.

An earlier test of 50 freshwater boats in the Portland, Oregon area by Kevin Ritz, the nation's foremost expert on ESD, found that 13 boats—26 percent—were leaking potentially lethal doses of electricity into the water. How much electricity is lethal? AC current flow of around 100 milliamps (mA) of AC current will put the heart into fibrillation and death will likely follow within seconds. But lesser amounts of electricity, say, 15- 30 mA, will create muscle paralysis, and even the best swimmers will be drowned. Note that most local law enforcement investigators don't have the technical background to recognize an ESD accident and there is no post-mortem evidence available to coroners to ascertain whether electricity was involved in a drowning. It is highly likely that there are many "drowning" victims who were actually electrocuted.

When ESD accidents are identified, the parents and friends of the victims are almost always unaware that swimming from an energized dock is dangerous. In many past ESD cases, bystanders who dove into the water to save children have also become victims.

To protect against ESD accidents, the American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC) adopted standards in 2010 that require an Equipment Leakage Circuit Interrupter (ELCI) be installed on new boats. However, not all boat manufacturers follow the ABYC standards, which are voluntary, and there is no requirement to retrofit ELCIs on older boats. There is also no standard that requires the installation of Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs) at marinas and private docks. (Note that in Europe, GFCIs have been required at marinas for almost 30 years and ESD is no longer a concern.) Until such time as freshwater boats and docks are safe—and that could be decades away—the best defense is to never swim near docks with energized 120-volt AC power. Signs should be posted warning children and parents to STAY OUT OF THE WATER! The rule has to be enforced. If someone must go into the water to retrieve something lost overboard, the electricity to the dock should be shut off.

Note that 12-volt electricity will not cause ESD. Nor will 120-volt current from a boat's generator unless another boat (with an electrical fault) is sharing electricity from the generator via a power cord. In saltwater, electricity does not cause ESD; saltwater is more conductive than the human body. There is not yet enough research to know at what point brackish water becomes dangerous or what distance from a possible electrical fault is safe. When in doubt, stay out.

Note: You can test to see if a boat is leaking electrical current using something called an AC clamp meter, which clamps onto a shore power cord and measures electricity going into the boat's electrical system and returning from the system. If the two numbers aren't exactly the same, electricity is in the water. Clamp meters, GFCIs and ELCIs are available at West Marine, (www.westmarine.com). If you have questions about your dock or boat's electrical system, your best source is an ABYC–certified marine electrician. To find someone who is qualified in your area, go to: www.abycinc.org/certification/directorySearch.cfm.

Inspecting Older Boats Runabouts And Center Cockpits

If You're Considering Buying A Used Boat Or Want To Prevent Problems On One You Have, These Tips From The BoatU.S. Marine Insurance Claim Files And The BoatU.S. Consumer Protection Bureau Can Help

Claim #0037465: An older 22-foot boat with a large 200-hp outboard was negotiating an inlet in Florida when the boat slammed into a large wave. The owner heard a sickening bang, then the engine stopped. His first reaction was that it was yet another problem with the *&#*@! engine. And it was a problem with the engine—the engine was gone along with the transom. The boat rolled over but remained afloat, leaving the owner clinging to the overturned hull until help arrived. Sometime later, he learned that the transom's plywood core, which gave the transom its strength to support a heavy engine, had rotted. In another claim (#0211546), the owner of a 20-foot center console was out fishing and noticed the boat settling lower into the water. When the bilge pump came on, the owner wisely donned a life jacket and then headed to the launch ramp. Once the boat was safely on its trailer, he found the previous owner had plumbed in a live well using a hardware store PVC valve, which had broken and allowed water to overflow into the bilge.

A proper inspection of a boat—whether it's one you already own or one you're considering buying—is simply a matter of knowing where to look for the most common problems. *Seaworthy*, with its warehouse of Marine Insurance claim files, has teamed up with the BoatU.S. Consumer Protection Bureau, and its 10,000-complaint database, to make it easier to know where to focus. Because many of these issues involve rot, corrosion, or manufacturers' defects and are therefore not covered by insurance, finding them early can avoid expensive headaches later. Keep in mind that an inspection is no substitute for a marine survey; if you're buying a boat, hire a professional after you've conducted your own checkout. In this issue, we'll focus on runabouts, which have their own unique set of problems. Other types of boats will be discussed in future articles.

Hull and Deck

Cores

The most serious structural issues on runabouts and center consoles are soft transom cores. Water that gets into the transom, as noted above, can eventually compromise the hull's structural integrity. Professionals use the handle of a screwdriver or a small plastic hammer to tap on the transom to listen for signs of softness, which is something you can do as well. Start at any fitting below the waterline; a healthy ring means a solid core, while a dull thud often signals a soft spot. Stains around poorly bedded fittings, such as transducers or tie-downs, often indicate water slowly leaking out of the transom, another warning sign. If you suspect a problem, contact a professional. The repair is not a job for the average boat owner because it involves removing the affected core from between the fiberglass sandwich.

Decks and floors can also suffer from water intrusion. Leaking fittings, such as railings and cleats, will cause the deck core, either balsa, wood, or foam, to absorb water and delaminate. A delaminated deck feels soft underfoot. Floors often rot around seat bases, where water has leaked past the fittings. Mushiness and wobbly seats can indicate deteriorated plywood in the floor.

Regular inspections of transoms, decks, and floors can prevent a small fixable core leak from becoming a major repair.

Hull-to-Deck Joints

Recently, BoatU.S. Consumer Protection received a complaint about a leaking hull-to-deck joint on a 2004 center console. Whenever the boat was underway, water leaked in from the hull-to-deck joint. At first, the owner couldn't find the location of the leak, but after peering at the inside of the hull at the hull-to-deck joint, he saw daylight through a crack where several rivets had fallen out. It also appeared that the manufacturer had not used enough—or any—sealant in the joint.

Make a thorough inspection of the joint (where accessible), looking for signs of previous leaks as well as loose rivets and screws. Damage to the rubrail often results in damage to the hull-to-deck joint underneath it.

Gelcoat and Paint

Though not the most dire, among the largest shares of complaints received by Consumer Protection involve crazed and cracked gelcoat. Gelcoat is a very thin coating over fiberglass (to make it look glossy) and easily cracks wherever excessive flexing occurs, such as on unsupported decks or cabin roofs, or where the boat structure makes a sharp angle—at cockpit corners, for example. Though usually not serious, it can indicate that a "hard point" from an internal structure like a bulkhead is pushing from within and can reveal places in the hull or on deck that have weak supports. Gelcoat cracking in the hull can indicate minor collisions or

trailering mishaps, though on lighter-built boats, they are often unavoidable. Crazing on a relatively new boat might call for a professional investigation. It's possible to re-gelcoat bad areas, but the cracking will almost certainly return unless the area is reinforced.

Sight along the hull for mismatched paint or gelcoat, which can signal a previous repair. Look for warps and dimples in the hull and topsides, which might indicate a structural problem. Blisters, unfortunately, are a common Consumer Protection complaint, and though unsightly, they rarely rise to the level of being unsafe.

Hull Fittings

A study by *Seaworthy* a few years ago found that 20 percent of runabout sinkings were caused by failed plastic fittings near the waterline. In one claim (#0105531), a plastic scupper fitting on a 23-foot fiberglass boat became brittle over time and broke; wave action at the dock was enough to fill the bilge, further forcing the fitting underwater until the boat finally sank. Check to make sure that thru-hull fittings are bronze or Marelon, not cheap plastic, which has a limited lifespan and deteriorates in sunlight. Also, look for live-well fittings that might have been improperly installed by a previous owner. They may be hardware store PVC and may not have been installed with a seacock, which is a necessity. Speaking of seacocks, they should operate smoothly. If they're jammed shut (or worse, jammed open), they need servicing or replacement.

Rusty or broken hose clamps must not be ignored. Hose clamp screws eventually rust, even on stainless steel clamps. Any indication of rust on the screws or clamps means a likely failure in the near future. Old hoses tend to swell, particularly where they attach to fittings. Swollen, cracked, or weeping hoses are past due for replacement.

Controls and Electrical System

Cables and Controls

At first glance, runabouts don't appear to have complicated systems like their larger counterparts. But while they may be simpler, any system that fails can be just as serious. Claim #0202658: A 21-foot ski boat was returning after a day of waterskiing when the operator made a sharp turn. The wheel jammed, causing the boat to narrowly miss a small fishing boat before running aground and damaging its hull and running gear. The investigating surveyor found the steering cable was severely rusted inside. The owner had recently tried to lubricate the cable, but once corrosion sets in, the only solution is to replace the cable. Tip: Take the cable in both hands (this goes for engine cables, too) and twist. If it sounds crunchy, it's deteriorated inside and needs to be replaced immediately.

Plastic thru-hulls get brittle and crack, which can sink a boat. They should be replaced with Marelon or bronze.

Electricals

Breaker panels are another potential trouble spot. The claim files show that sometimes a well-meaning do-it-yourselfer makes sloppy work of installing a new radio or other electronics. In one claim (#02001256), an owner's friend helped him install a new VHF in a 19-foot center console but didn't install a fuse in the positive wire. The wire chafed and shorted while the boat was being trailered, starting a fire in a storage compartment that severely damaged the boat. Check the inside of the breaker panel carefully, looking for chafed or melted wires, or wires that are loose or unsupported. Also look for wires that have been connected with anything other than a crimp connector. Twist connectors, typically used in a house, should never be used on a boat because they won't stand up to vibration, moisture, and pounding.

Don't forget to check the battery. Every battery needs an on/off switch and must be in a box with a cover on it, or at least have a cover over the positive terminal. An exposed positive lug can start a fire if something metallic, such as a loose wrench or clamp, shorts it to ground. Batteries also need to be tied down so they don't break loose in a seaway.

Engine and Fuel

Fuel Tanks

Consumer Protection receives many complaints about leaking aluminum fuel tanks. In some cases, owners reported the leaks appeared after only three or four years, which resulted in several manufacturers issuing recalls. In some cases, the tanks had been installed too close to bilge water. Worse, some had been installed on top of absorbent material that kept water in contact with the aluminum. Look for white powder on the aluminum, a sure sign of corrosion. Note that many boats lack even modest access to the tank, and some tanks are foamed into place, making it even more difficult to inspect or replace them. Don't forget to check the fuel hose from the tank to the engine and pay special attention to the primer bulb because it tends to get damaged easily.

Drivetrain and Prop

Engines are beyond the scope of this article, but you can still inspect the drivetrain and prop. Check for corrosion on the drive leg—usually seen as peeling paint and pitting on the aluminum. Missing or wasted anodes can lead to rapid corrosion.

Dings and bent blades in the prop mean lower fuel economy and more vibration with the potential for engine damage. A good prop shop can make the propeller as good as new for a reasonable price. Skegs should be straight and not chipped, though they can usually be repaired fairly inexpensively.

Do Some Research

BoatU.S. members have access to the Consumer Protection Database, which contains thousands of complaints. Before buying a boat, do a little homework and search the database by make and model: my.BoatUS.com/consumer/database.aspx

It's also a good idea to check the USCG recall database: www.uscgboating.org/recalls/search.aspx. If a boat you're looking at (or your own boat) is listed in the database, call the manufacturer with the Hull Identification Number in hand and see if the recall has been addressed. There's no expiration on recalls, and if the work hasn't been completed yet, the manufacturer is obligated to do it.

SMALL Stuff

In the last issue of *Seaworthy*, there was a "slight inaccuracy," which is how Myron Hittinger, a member in Harstine Island, Washington, put it. The boat shown on the back cover crashing through a wave was actually in Morro Bay, California, and not in Oregon. The boat, *Mojo*, was being chartered by George C. Scott and his wife.

And now for a lesson in gratitude, or at least a lesson in why you should take care when securing your dinghy: Charles Holly was zipping across Lake Erie in his 270 Sea Ray last summer when he spotted something bobbing up and down in the water a few hundred yards away. As he got closer, he could see that it was a dinghy with a small outboard—a NEW (his emphasis) Mercury 9.9 -hp four-stroke. The fuel line was disconnected and the dinghy's painter was floating in the water.

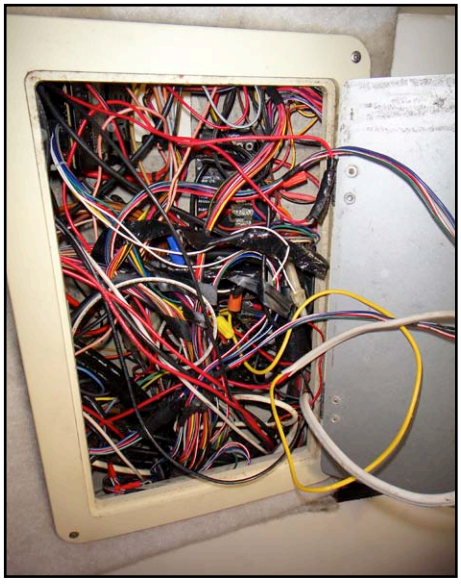
While not exactly the *Mary Celeste*, the dinghy did have some value and, like a lot of people, Charles assumed he had "salvage rights." And in centuries gone by, that may have been true. Under current state laws, however, making a claim was probably more trouble than the dinghy was worth, but it didn't matter because his wife insisted that he "do the right thing" and return the dinghy to its owner, whoever that was.

Doing the right thing wasn't easy. Because they had to tow the dinghy at a glacial 8 mph, the trip back to the marina took an extra hour-and-a-half. Shortly after he got back, Charles contacted the Coast Guard and learned that the lost dinghy had already been reported missing. He was put in touch with its owner, who, far from being grateful, cheerfully asked if he would deliver the dinghy to his marina.

Charles said no.

An hour or so later, the guy picked up his dinghy, thanked Charles again and then, as he was scurrying away, said something about maybe buying him a drink sometime. That was it. Charles thought that the man could have at least offered to pay for some of the fuel.

Charles did the right thing, which, as he said later, was reward enough. As for the dinghy's owner, he clearly needs to do a better job securing his dinghy and maybe brush up on his own obligation to "do the right thing."



From time to time, *Seaworthy* likes to revisit our "Do-It-Yourselfers Gone Amuck" theme with a good photo. The one above is from Dan Rutherford, a marine surveyor in Cape May, New Jersey, who noted that the boat's electrical system included butt connectors, twist-style connectors, cut wires, and multiple conductors in some of the butts. If you're not sure what all of that means, imagine a house made with bricks and duct tape. It was, he said, an accident waiting to happen.

If you do your own electrical work, don't think that the same techniques you use in your home will also be safe and effective in your boat. They won't. Unlike a house, a boat bounces, rocks, and occasionally pounds, always in a damp, corrosive environment, and its electrical system must be constructed to a considerably higher standard—the ABYC E-11 standard. You, or whoever does your electrical work, must follow the E-11 standard to the letter (www.abycinc.org). If not, you could wind up with a dangerous mess like the one on the left.

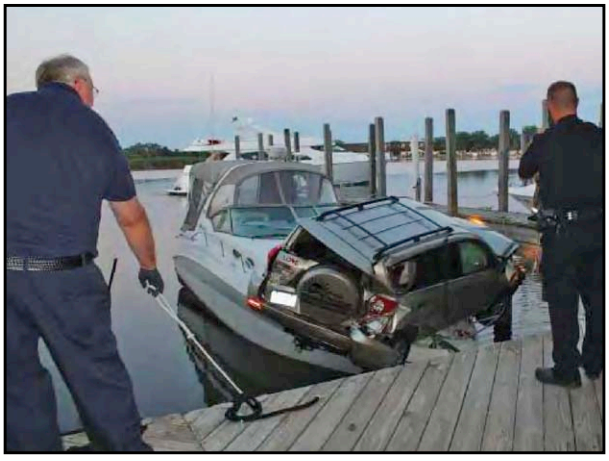
When Elaine Dickinson retired after 26 years as the managing editor for *BoatU.S. Magazine*, her plan was to make up for all of those years writing about other people and their boats by spending as much time as possible on her own boat, a 42-foot Catalina sailboat that she owns with her husband Jack Hornor. After an entire year, here are a few things she's learned: If you wait until the end of January to leave for the Bahamas, you F-R-E-E-Z-E all of the way to Florida. Also, bridges and locks open painfully slowly in cold weather. And even when you reach the Bahamas (Abacos), the average daytime temperature and blustery winds in February mean you'll spend almost as much time in sweaters as you do in bathing suits. The vision she had of diving overboard before breakfast every morning was not to be.

The biggest lesson came in South Carolina as they were being pelted by hail in

an especially ferocious thunderstorm: Lightning can whack your boat. More to the point, lightning did whack their boat. Both Elaine and Jack, a marine surveyor, knew a lightning strike was a possibility, but once the storm struck, they became so preoccupied with avoiding tug and barge traffic as well as not being maimed by flying hail that they didn't give lightning much thought until, KABOOM, it hit their mast. Then they gave it a lot of thought. In addition to scaring them witless, the lightning destroyed the boat's electronics and, they learned sometime later, left some weird exit marks under the boat's hull. Despite the damage, the hull wasn't leaking.

Jack sent along the picture (previous page), which he says is a good example of why boats insured with BoatU.S. are always hauled out of the water and inspected after a lightning strike.

As a sort of silver lining to all of this, shortly after the lightning encounter, the National Women's Sailing Association presented Elaine, a lifelong sailor, with the 2012 Women's Leadership in Sailing Award! Among her long list of professional accomplishments, Elaine served two years as chairman of the National Safe Boating Council and served a three-year appointment to the U.S. Coast Guard's National Safe Boating Advisory Council.



Having a slip against the bulkhead has its advantages — you don't have to walk far to get to your boat, which makes loading/unloading much easier. But, as you can see, it can also have some spectacular disadvantages (Claim #12GPP00026).

According to the claim file, the driver of the car, a 39-year-old woman, first backed into a boat trailer before driving forward and launching her small SUV onto the boat. Alcohol was NOT a factor. A local television station reported that this was the second time the woman had driven off a dock. The first time was in 2009.

Another good photo: A J-24 sailboat that disappeared from its mooring in New York two years ago was finally located—directly under the mooring ball.

Forbes Magazine recently ran an article, "The Future of Online Shopping," which noted that buying online was a trend that was "about to explode." This is certainly true with buying used boats; what used to take days of driving around to marinas looking at boats can now be done in minutes with the click of a mouse. Aside from defects that may not be readily apparent on a computer screen, long-distance boat buying has some potential glitches. BoatU.S. Consumer Protection has received many complaints not only about the physical conditions of boats being advertised, but also about less-than-honest sellers. A few boats either haven't had titles or have had titles that were forged, indicating that they were probably stolen. These boats are often being sold at deep discounts. The biggest complaint Consumer Protection gets about online boat sales, however, is that once a buyer gets the boat home, it doesn't work as advertised. In some cases, the boat won't plane, won't start, or has serious structural problems. One member, for example, found that the engine in his new boat had a cracked block from freeze damage.

No matter how attractive a boat may look online, never buy a boat without a careful inspection, first by you and then by a marine surveyor. It will be money well-spent. BoatU.S. provides a list of qualified surveyors, listed by region, at www.BoatUS.com/insurance/survey.asp

Most importantly, remember the old adage: "If it's too good to be true, it probably is." If a boat is being sold online for half of what it's worth, there's probably a good reason.

This past July, a member named Jim in Levittown, New York, contacted *Seaworthy* with some questions about a fishfinder/chartplotter combo he was thinking about installing on his new (to him) Bayliner Trophy. Here's the deal: *Seaworthy* editors want to be helpful, but we're only reliably good at answering questions about things like ethanol, hurricane prep, why boats sink, and maybe explaining how a typo found its way into print. Unless we happen to own the same model GPS or VHF you're asking about, we're not going to be much help with specifications.

If you have questions about a specific make or model electronics, you'll be much happier with the help you get from the tech people at West Marine: cattech@westmarine.com. They have hundreds of catalogs, which include features and specifications, from all of the marine manufacturers. They're also friendly, which is nice.

Finally, a short story from Michael Karbowski, a *Seaworthy* reader on the West Coast: "The town of Port Townsend lies along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the entry way into Puget Sound and the city of Seattle; we stay there overnight while fishing for halibut and salmon. If you ever stay in the marina, beware of river otters! One night we had gone to bed with dreams of catching huge halibut dancing in our heads. The fish cooler was locked and secure with 40 pounds of weights placed on top. The canvas door was snapped shut to prevent any entry into the cockpit.

"Shortly after we closed our eyes, we heard the gentle pitter- patter of an invading creature climbing onto the swim platform. None of us rushed to the door knowing that 'Fort Knox' was safe. The creature began unsnapping the cockpit canvas. We weren't worried. Once the creature discovered how secure our bait was, he'd move on to the next boat. Suddenly, we heard a loud crash. The little"#@*%" had pushed the heavy bucket over, causing it to lodge against the door. We were locked in our own boat! The otter smiled at us through the plexiglass door and then, as we stood helpless, he cleaned out every piece of bait. We had to crawl out a hatch to escape.

"The next morning, we were feeling grumpy and tired, but had to laugh at being outsmarted once again by a river otter."

For more West Coast stories, go to www.BoatUS.com/Seaworthy.

Retiring From A Dream Job *by Bob Adriance*

For the first time in my 35-year career, I'm going to do something I've never done before: write in the first person. I'm doing this for two reasons. First I'm retiring at the end of the year so I'm becoming a little reckless. And, second, to write about my own retirement in the third person would sound ridiculous. So here goes.

Thirty-five years ago, I decided that I really wanted to work at BoatU.S. because I loved boats. The only job opening at the time was for an assistant warehouse manager and I got the job mostly, I suspect, because nobody else wanted it. BoatU.S. only had 20,000 members and the pay was terrible, but, what the heck, the organization was growing quickly and I thought it had a bright future. I was right. Starting on my first day, truck after truck began backing up to the loading dock with anchors, depthfinders, rope, marine heads, life jackets, cotter pins . . . all of which had to be put somewhere even though the warehouse was already packed. Soon the warehouse was bulging, but every time another truck arrived, I had to find a place to put the stuff. Things quickly got out of control. Anchors and cotter pins were crammed in everywhere.

The boss called me into his office one day and said he wanted me to work on the BoatU.S. Equipment Catalog because—this is a quote—*"I hope you'll do less damage."* My new job would be to write about things like cotter pins and Type II marine heads with the goal of—another quote—*"making them sound exciting!"* That job didn't go well either but at least I learned how to type, which brings us (me) to *Seaworthy*.

From the moment I began working on *Seaworthy*, I loved it. I loved the idea of using the claim files to prevent accidents. I loved the idea of helping people, and I loved writing about boats, even boats that had been sunk or blown up. I also liked not having to unload trucks or write odes to marine heads. I fell in love with my job and have never looked back. For over 30 years, I've been paid to (this is only a partial list): Go down the Mississippi pushing five acres of barges; race America's Cup 12-meter sailboats in the Caribbean; go on patrol with the Coast Guard on a 210-foot cutter; ride aboard a 980-foot containership from Charleston to Port Everglades; race antique schooners down the Chesapeake Bay; cruise around the British Virgin Islands in a 45-foot trawler; and stand on the bridge of an aging Atlantic liner as it came into Manhattan at dawn. Note the part about getting paid; sometimes I have to pinch myself.

The obvious question is, why would someone leave a job they love and get paid for? It's a good question, one that isn't easy to answer. I'm certainly not getting any younger and after driving back and forth to the same office like a yoyo for 35 years, it's time for a change. Grandchildren grow up quickly. I'd also like to think of myself as something other than a weekend sailor. Beth Leonard and Chuck Fort, the remarkably accomplished *Seaworthy* editors who will be taking over, have logged tens of thousands of miles of extended cruising. Now it's my turn.

Finally, one nice thing about writing for a living is that as long as you're plunking away on your keyboard, everybody thinks you're working. This has given me the opportunity to correspond with hundreds of readers—my e-mail buddies—who have taken the time to write *Seaworthy*. While most of the material in *Seaworthy* is from the BoatU.S. claim files, these readers have provided a lot of terrific (and funny!) stories and photos that have found their way into print, either as Personal Accounts or in Small Stuff. My sincere thanks to all of you.
