

## [ BOATS ]

### Winterization and Winter Projects

Story by Troy Buzalsky

When the snows fall and the white winds blow, the lone wolf dies, but the pack survives. In winter, we must protect one another, keep each other warm, share our strengths, and hate those who would truly do us harm. This paraphrased quote was echoed by Ned Stark from the novel *A Game of Thrones* and can be easily adapted to the importance of winterizing your boat.

The lone wolf is the unprotected boat, and the wolf pack is the collective genius of boat builders, mechanics, and boat owners who have learned the lessons of boating life, sharing their wisdom and ways against the harmful effects of neglect, deferred maintenance, and the unforgiving winter elements.

When you Google “boat winterization” it’s not uncommon to be reminded of the 4 Fs: Fuel, Flushing, Fogging, and Freeze protection. These are all critical seasonal elements, but the list is much more exhaustive, and must include basic preventive maintenance, because there is nothing more costly than deferred maintenance when it comes to boat longevity.

With winter knocking on our door, some have already put the boat away,



Bob Graham from EZ Way Metal Polishing puts the shine on this aluminum fishing machine. © Troy Buzalsky

while others are eking out one last voyage. This column is going to highlight a few often-overlooked considerations for this year’s winter preparedness and project list.

#### Bottom Paint

If you store your boat in the water at least part of the year, keeping the hull free of marine growth with quality antifouling paint is critical to keep it at peak performance. This preventative maintenance task should be at the top of your list, especially when you pull the boat out of the water for its winter respite. Not only does a clean hull

help maintain longevity and prevent expensive repairs, it also promotes safety, speed, and efficiency.

Are you a boater that needs to consider bottom paint? The answer to this question can be “Yes” or “No” depending on the boat’s use. Joel Morse, Co-Founder and General Manager at Ashbreez Boatworks in Anchorage, stresses that one of the most important things he does is listen to how customers use their boats before suggesting if bottom paint is needed, and what type of antifouling bottom paint to recommend.

Hull materials including aluminum and fiberglass have different characteristics. Where aluminum is subject to saltwater corrosion, especially in cracks, crevices, and seams, fiberglass is subject to osmosis and blistering. In all these cases, well-applied and maintained bottom paint is time and money well spent. Joel explained, “Just recently we had a brand-new aluminum boat moored in the water in Homer without bottom paint. In two months, one season in this case, we scraped 30 gallons of barnacles off the boat’s bottom.” When a barnacle attaches to the hull it pits the surface and facilitates corrosion, which can cause expensive damage. Bottom paint would have prevented this damage.

Fiberglass blisters occur because water passes through the gelcoat. Water soluble chemicals inside the laminate exert an osmotic pull on water outside, and some water molecules find a way through the gelcoat. As more water is attracted into the enclosed space, internal pressure builds, causing blisters. A boat needing blister repair gets expensive, as the blisters must be ground out and filled. Boat paint is the best defense against fiberglass hull osmosis and blistering.



A newly built boat at Ashbreez Boatworks with a fresh coat of bottom paint. Just say no to slime, barnacles, and growth. © Ashbreez Boatworks



There are two main types of bottom paint: ablative paint and hard paint. Joel explains that for the most part, Alaskan boats in Alaskan waters are best served with ablative paints. An exception might be a sailboat, which will generally stay in the water for longer durations than pleasure crafts and the general fishing fleet.

The science behind ablative paints allows for the friction of the boat running in the water to act as a cleaning tool. The paint is actually referred to as self-polishing in that the constant rubbing of hull and water provides for a constant washing. This is possible because of the "soft" nature of ablative paint. The chemical makeup of ablative paints also allows for them to survive outside of the water (on a trailer or dry storage), and not lose much of their safeguards. Most ablative paints also contain special chemicals that combat slime, mussels, and barnacles.

Although bottom painting could be considered a do-it-yourself project, Joel warns that it's very physically demanding to prep the boat, and it requires special tools including a pressure washer, sanders, grinders, stands, and applicators. Also, be warned that the chemical makeup of the paints can be nasty; due caution is required to avoid skin contact and respiratory protection should be worn. Plus, you must protect the environment from sanding residue, overspray, drips, and spills.

When bottom painting a boat, the prep is by far the most important step which includes masking, mechanical etching, primer application, and several coats of bottom paint. Subsequent re-coating of bottom paint usually should occur every three- to five years, and the re-coat will cost approximately 1/3 of the original application. It's not uncommon for a 30-foot boat to take five- to seven days for the initial bottom paint, allowing for prep, cure times, and final coat.

Bottom paint technology has come a long way and is always changing, because let's face it, we are putting our boats in the water with what is basically a long-lasting herbicide coating. Newer generations of bottom paint also offer a host of colors, so no longer are you stuck with a chalky gray color.

#### Buff and Polish

When we contemplate buffing and polishing our boats we are generally thinking about beautification, but that's not always the case, especially boats that spend time in the marine environment.

You don't want to mess up that shiny

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These offshore twins were shrink wrapped and utilized frames to help shed the snow, ice, and rain. © Alaska Shrink Wrap

gelcoat or painted surface, but the thought of spending countless hours manually waxing on and waxing off polishing compound and wax sealer until exhaustion, takes the fun out of the already dreaded deed. Making the move from polishing your boat by hand to doing it mechanically may be intimidating, but in reality, it's the only way to get a truly professional finish.

I watched my neighbor, Matt, buff and

polish his 26-foot runabout last week, spending three straight days working on her. She turned out beautifully. Afterwards we chatted and he shared that he had spent his early years in the family body shop detailing cars, so he was no novice when it came to detailing...and it showed.

Matt's technique was pretty simple and effective. His first step was to cut the surface with 1000 grit wet sandpaper.

He used a dual-action sander, but this step is actually easy by hand too, and considered optional. Once the surface was cut, he used his variable speed, forced rotation, dual-action sander (yes, that's a mouthful) starting with a polishing compound, in this case Presta Ultra Cutting Cream. The more fatigued the surface, the coarser the compound; in this case he stepped up to Presta Super Cut. Using a wool cutting pad, he suggests applying the compound directly to the pad, and to work the pad flat on the surface, letting the tool and compound polish the surface.

Once the initial polishing is complete, the surface needs to be sealed. There are many quality waxes on the market, and some made specifically for gelcoat. Preferring a paste wax for its lasting qualities, Matt recommends 3M Marine Ultra Performance Paste Wax, which is approved for both gelcoat and topside paint. Matt explained that once the boat is polished, hand waxing is actually the easy part. You have more control and it's a great time to slow down and make sure you're polishing off all the old buffing residue at the same time. His final tip: use lots of clean, microfiber towels on the final buff; don't think one or two shop towels will get the job done well!

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Ablative bottom paint is self-polishing when running. This 28-foot Ashbreez St. Elias is literally cleaning its bottom as it runs. © Ashbreez Boatworks

### Canvas and Vinyl

Your boat canvas and upholstered vinyl is exposed to an unforgiving marine environment and a pounding assault from the sun's ultraviolet rays. Therefore, it's important to maintain your canvas and vinyl and only use the highest-quality, marine-grade fabrics, hardware, cleaners, and conditioners.

The best way to prolong the look and performance of boat seats and upholstery is to keep them clean and protected. Routine cleaning includes a solution of mild soap and water, sponged or wiped on, and then rinsed clean and dried. Fish slime, egg goo, baits, scents, and oils sometimes require additional cleaning... if you can still smell it, you still need to clean it.

Deep cleaning of vinyl is the second step, and often overlooked. This is when you get the bristle brush out and utilize a marine vinyl cleaner, like 303 Multi-Surface Cleaner or the equivalent. Apply the cleaner and scrub lightly with the bristle brush and wipe dry with a microfiber cloth. Mold and mildew are sometimes more stubborn, and for these, consider 30 SECONDS Outdoor Multi Surface Cleaner. I personally use it by the gallon, but be careful, and don't wear your Sunday's best when applying it because it contains bleach. Once clean, it's best to apply a protectant to all vinyl that includes UV protection, like 303 UV Aerospace Protectant.

Sunbrella SeaMark, Top Gun, Sailrite, and Sur Last are just a few names of quality marine canvas products. Boat canvas needs regular maintenance, and from time to time, deep cleaning and water-repellent treatment.

The first step of care for canvas is

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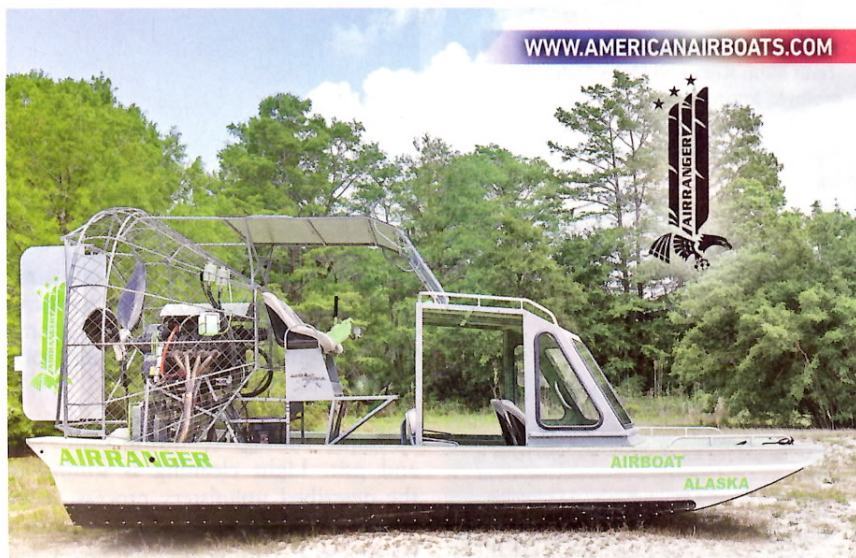


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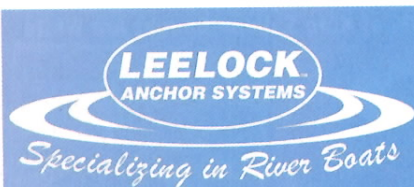
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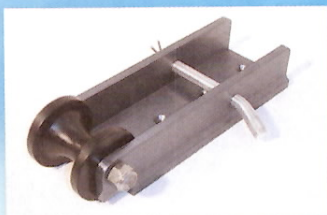


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Top caption: A new coat of bottom paint will protect your boat. © Ashbreez Boatworks. Bottom caption: Custom stands and a creeper help make this labor-intensive bottom paint job a little easier and safer. © Ashbreez Boatworks.

a simple rinsing, removing dust, salt, and grit. Light cleaning is similar to the described upholstery process, using a mild soap and water solution, with a bristle brush, rinsing after the soap is left standing for 10- to 15 minutes.

For heavy cleaning use a stronger soap-water mixture, and add one cup of bleach or 30 SECONDS Outdoor Multi Surface Cleaner. Scrub on and thoroughly wash off. Never use hot water or a pressure washer.

Marine canvas is generally treated with a water- and stain-resistant product, which over time degrades and becomes ineffective. It's recommended to re-treat your canvas every five years with a water

treatment like 303 High Tech Fabric Guard. In a dry area while using a pump sprayer, lightly coat the surface evenly and let dry. Two coats are recommended for best results.

### Shrink Wrap

Don't ruin it! Cocoon it! "The main reason to shrink wrap your boat, obviously, is to protect it," shares Nick Riney of Alaska Shrink Wrap. "It will keep out rain, snow, ice, and UV light, and quite frankly, save money in the long run." Nick's been operating out of Soldotna, Alaska, since 2006, and has wrapped thousands of boats, RVs, airplanes, and heavy equipment.



He also provides shrink-wrap covers for canopies/carpports, which provide amazing strength and durability against Alaskan weather.

Shrink wrapping is a process that seals your boat up and protects it from the elements when you don't intend to use it for a while. This will protect your investment from rain, snow, and rodents looking for shelter from wind and cold. It can also be a good option when preparing the boat for transportation.

Shrink wrap is a layer of 7- to 9 mm polyethylene that is cut to fit over the top and around your boat. This layer comes with UV inhibitors built in to protect your boat from the sun's rays if stored outside. Shrink wrap is made to shrink and conform to shape when heat is applied to it, creating a seal which is much tighter than any boat cover can provide. Vents can also be installed to help the boat breathe during its time in storage.

Canvas boat covers are suitable for short-term storage; however, a snug shrink-wrap cover offers a more durable solution for long-term storage. While there are do-it-yourself kits for shrink wrapping, this is usually a job best left to your boat yard or a mobile shrink-wrapping service, like Alaska Shrink Wrap. Alaska Shrink Wrap's mobile service travels statewide, and their tools and equipment can be transported by vehicle or bush plane.

Alaska Shrink Wrap is a true one-stop shop. Before shrink wrapping, the boats are cleaned and dried, and desiccant packs are installed where needed. They pick up and deliver as necessary, and also offer full winterization service. They even build reusable frames that help shape and shield before they shrink wrap. It's also possible to reuse your shrink wrap cover if you carefully remove it, saving money and time in future years.

Just like when the snows fall and the white winds blow, the lone wolf dies, but the pack survives, if you do your due diligence in boating maintenance, chances are you will have a more successful boating season.

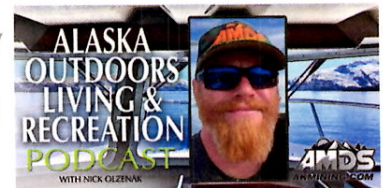


*Troy Buzalsky is the Boats columnist for Fish Alaska, and when not writing about boats or working his career in the fire service, Troy can likely be found chasing fish in the Pacific Northwest and the 49th state and writing about those adventures. Troy can be reached at [troybuz@comcast.net](mailto:troybuz@comcast.net).*



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