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Proper Maintenance of your Vessel

As a 24-year veteran in the Yacht Brokerage Industry, I see up close and personal hundreds of boats a year in varying states of condition. While most yachts and vessels get the usual wash and wax and the yearly engine service, for many that is all the maintenance ever performed. This level of service will suffice for a year or two for a brand new vessel, but beyond that there is much to do to keep a vessel in tiptop condition.

Safety takes the highest priority aboard a vessel. Fire Suppression Systems, Safety Gear, Bilge Pumps, Float Switches, Sea-cocks, Raw Water Hoses and Hose Clamps should all be checked on a regular basis. Fire Suppression Systems, Fire Extinguishers and Flair Kits all have expiration dates or inspection dates. These items must be inspected or replaced on or before those dates. Sea-cocks should be exercised on a regular basis and raw water hoses and clamps (including exhaust system hoses) should be inspected and replaced at the first signs of wear. It is even a good idea to set a timeline for replacement every four or five years regardless of signs of wear.

Engine and driveline service consists of more than just an oil change. All marine engines have sacrificial anodes that require regular inspection, especially for vessels that see regular use and those that are stored in the water. Severe engine and or running gear damage will occur if the anodes are not replaced at the end of their useful life. Raw-water cooling system impellers require renewing every season or more often upon the hourly service interval. Freshwater cooling systems require cleaning and re-sealing every two or three years or when hourly service intervals are met, whichever occurs first. Turbo Diesels need special attention to their cooling systems, especially the After Cooler (also known as the Air Charge Cooler). After coolers are generally made from soft metals such as aluminum (internally) and they are very susceptible to internal corrosion. A failure in an After Cooler will introduce raw water directly into the engines combustion chamber that will immediately lead to complete engine failure. Inboard vessels require their shaft seals to be inspected and adjusted annually. A failed shaft seal is able to sink a vessel rather quickly.

Exterior hardware requires removal and re-bedding with the proper compounds every few years and more often on vessels stored outside and exposed to the sun and rain. Caulk and bedding compound seals the internal structures of the hull and deck from moisture intrusion. Vibration, heat and age will eventually compromise those compounds, allowing water intrusion. That water intrusion can lead to fiberglass delamination and core rot if left unchecked. Exterior hardware consists of anything mounted to a hull, deck, house or hardtop structure. Common compound failures occur around hatches, portlights, hinges, cleats, windlasses, running lights, railings, grab handles and electronics antennas.

Cosmetics are also important to a vessel. Vessel finishes such as gelcoat, paint and varnish, if allowed to deteriorate, can lower a vessels value. If allowed to deteriorate too far, restoration can become extremely expensive. Vessels stored in the weather should be washed at least bi-monthly and exterior surfaces waxed or sealed quarterly. Do not forget to polish all metals and isinglass at those quarterly intervals. Bilges also require cleaning and metal components need to be coated with the proper coatings (paint, lubricant, corrosion inhibitor) to keep corrosion at bay. Oil absorb pads should be placed below engines and machinery in the dry areas of the bilge. First, they will alert you to any leaking via staining on the pads and, secondly, they will keep oil and other dangerous chemicals from making their way to the bilge pumps and into the environment. Chemical spills are subject to extremely expensive fees and fines.

Follow these guidelines and your vessel should give you many years of trouble free service and look great at the same time.