WINTERING IN THE EUROPEAN INLAND WATERWAYS

Winterising a boat kept on the inland waterways differs in a number of respects from winterising a 'salt water' boat. Marine growth is less of an issue (which is why many boats are wintered in the water) and fresh water has less tendency to encrust or corrode boat systems. The principal issues to be addressed are the risk of freezing (especially the further north a boat is wintered); preventing water ingress if wintering afloat; keeping engine, domestic systems, batteries and soft furnishings in good order and – especially – avoiding the damaging effects of increased humidity on the interior.

Engine

- Change oil prior to laying up and run engine to distribute it
- Consider spraying suitable rust inhibiting oil directly into the engine air intake (**after** the air filter!) just before shutting down (although not always easy on some engines)
- Check coolant antifreeze concentration with a suitable tester
- Drain fresh water cooling system unless running antifreeze through the engine to protect it from freezing and corrosion
- Drain exhaust system unless protecting with antifreeze
- Leave fuel tanks full to reduce condensation risk (some owners add preventative treatments such as Fuel Set) and close fuel lines to prevent leakage
- Remove impeller if possible to avoid deforming over the winter
- If practical, block air intake and exhaust outlets to prevent infestations/nest building
- Finally, spray engine with rust inhibiting spray (some owners also cover their engine with a heavy blanket to reduce condensation)

Batteries

- Top up batteries if not sealed
- Check all terminals for corrosion, clean and grease with Vaseline or similar
- Isolate from boat electrical system and disconnect all leads unless arranging charging regime (or leaving an auto bilge pump on when wintering in the water)
- Arrange periodic charging if possible (some marinas/yards will re-connect power monthly for the purpose)

Domestic systems

- Drain water system by opening all taps (unless flushing with potable antifreeze)
- * Drain hot water calorifier
- † Pump out residual water if possible, otherwise drain all pumps and rigid piping
- Disconnect all gas bottles and close any valves
- Defrost fridge/freezer and wedge door open
- Drain toilet(s), holding tank(s) and shower drain unless flushing with antifreeze
- Pump antifreeze through bilge pump lines

- Check all seacocks and close if wintering in the water; leave open if wintering on land
- Remove log impeller (and fit blank if in water)
- Open all locker doors (and leave open)

** Ensure you switch off/disconnect if leaving power connected to avoid accidental burn-out*

† Some owners install a dedicated pump in the circuit purely to drain any remaining water

Deck and hull

- If lifting out, wash down hull and sponge to remove slime if not re-antifouling
- Clean prop, propshaft and thruster prop if out of the water
- Clean and abrade anodes back to bright metal
- Clean and wax topsides
- Remove and stow sprayhood/bimini/cabriolet
- Install winter cover if available
- Check and grease fuel filler 'O' ring (biggest source of water ingress to fuel tanks)

Interior

- Remove berth and seat cushions to allow air circulation
- Close curtains/blinds or cover windows for insulation/UV protection
- Arrange ventilation (if possible without risk from weather)
- Install dehumidifier (‡ if guaranteed power available) or dehumidifier packs (available from most supermarkets)
- Drain and clean bilge

‡ If leaving a boat connected to power, beware of the risk of galvanic corrosion. For steel boats, a galvanic isolator or - better still - an isolation transformer is strongly advised.

Mooring

If wintering in the water, there are several additional things to consider:

- Ensure mooring lines are securely tied, allowing for stretch
- Check for any risk of chafe and protect lines if necessary
- Tie off lines on the boat rather than at the shore end to reduce the risk of vandalism
- Check that fendering is adequate and can't be accidentally displaced
- If stern-to a pontoon, consider crossing over stern mooring lines to limit travel
- If alongside a quay or fixed platform, be sure to allow for possible variations in water levels

Note: *please send any suggested updates or corrections to* ***eiws@theca.org.uk****.*