

Spring Cleaning Your Sweet Sixteen

I have had a great time this spring helping some new “first time” Sweet Sixteen owners rig and tune their boats. Some of the seemingly minor maintenance items that appeared obvious to me were surprising to the new owners. Pens and pads came out and they took notes. It occurred to me that perhaps a list of helpful hints on spring maintenance might be helpful. This article will attempt to address the items critical to an enjoyable sailing season but is not to be considered all inclusive. I invite others to add to this document and help improve it and make it complete.

Trailer

Let's start with the trailer. First, leave it on the winter storage blocks. You say what blocks? Well, I recommend that when you make your S-16 ready for winter storage that you jack it up and place blocking under the axle and lower the air pressure in the tires. This will extend the life of your tires and wheel bearings. The reason you are leaving it on the blocks for now is simply that if you do not have bearing buddies then you will need to remove each tire and hub to service the wheel bearings. Be sure to use marine grease when you repack the bearings. If you do a lot of travel with your S-16 a spare hub and bearing set is a cheap investment and will prevent having to leave your boat parked on the Interstate while you search for a new bearing if one fails and they DO fail. Now you have the bearings serviced and you have increased the tire pressure to the recommendations for your specific tire and you may remove the blocking but be sure to chock the wheels. Be sure to check the wiring, lights and license plate bolts. Lightly lube the hitch attachment mechanism and the trailer should be set to go. Ummmmmm is the license current????????

Mast, Shrouds & Fittings

Next let's take a look at the mast. Start at the top and inspect the main halyard sheave. Look for excessive wear, cracks or chips. It is a good idea to remove the pin and lubricate it on at least annually. Continue down the mast and check ALL pins, safety rings, rivets and screws. You are looking for rusted or worn cotter pins and rings and loose rivets and screws. If the loose screws will not snug up then replace them with a slightly larger piece. If you find loose rivets due to wear or hole elongation, you may have to replace them with a larger piece of hardware. Now is also a good time to lubricate all of the blocks attached to the mast with a good quality dry lube product designed for sailing hardware. It is also good a maintenance practice to clean the mast with a suitable product and then a light coat of polish to reduce the effects of oxidation and extend the life of your mast. Do not forget to inspect and replace the wind indicator before you step the mast. Be sure to closely inspect your shrouds and look for broken strands of wire. Be careful in doing this as the broken wires can inflict nasty puncture wounds. Next inspect the swage fittings for hairline cracks or corrosion. Hairline cracks are easily detected using a dye or stain and wiping off excess. The dye or stain will remain in the hairline cracks if they are present. If you find any defects then it is time to replace the shrouds. This will prevent having to retrieve your mast, boom and sails from the deep six when you have a shroud failure. Clean and inspect your mast step. Loose screws attaching the step to the centerboard trunk that spin and will not tighten are indicators of wood rot in the centerboard trunk. If rot is discovered then it MUST be repaired before you step the mast to prevent severe damage to the centerboard trunk. Wood rot repair will be discussed in detail in a future document.

Now you should be ready to install your main, jib and spinnaker halyards and other running rigging depending on how your S-16 is configured. Hopefully you removed them and gave them a good inspection before proper winter storage. Be sure to sight down the center line of your mast to make sure it is straight. Correcting a crooked mast is relative inexpensive if you can find a machine shop that will do it for you. I have the contact information for a couple of providers of this service in the Kansas City area.

Tangs

Another often overlooked maintenance item is the shroud tangs. These are generally bolted through the hull with three stainless bolts and nuts. I have seen these loosen over time and the movement is capable of elongating the holes in the fiberglass hull and could lead to pull through and failure. Now you are ready to step the mast.

The items listed above will take care of your standing rig and should allow you a full season of sailing in normal conditions without worry of failure. But remember it is always a good idea to regularly inspect this system as it is under the most stress.

Other items that need to be considered are listed below.

Nuts, Bolts and Screws

Check every single nut bolt and screw on the boat. ***Yes every single one***. The vibration under stress is transmitted throughout the entire hull and I have seen lock nuts spin completely off of the traveler track at mid season. So if you are sailing often in heavy pressure you will need to check all nuts, bolts and screws on a regular basis. This includes the screws that fasten your rub rail. A screw that works its way out of the rub rail can cause a serious wound to a bare leg while hiking in heavy winds. So be sure to check ALL nuts, bolts and screws.

Blocks, fairleads and tracks

Check all blocks for wear, cracks and chips. Make sure that they all run freely. Lubricate them with a dry lube product designed for this purpose. Clean all tracks on the boat. This may be fairlead and traveler tracks on some boats depending on how it is configured. After a good cleaning you should also use a dry lube product here as well. Another often overlooked spot to use the dry lube is on the surface of the fairlead where the jib sheet passes through. This will reduce friction and chaffing and extend the life of your jib sheets. Inspect cam cleats for wear and rounding of corners in the jaw then dry lube.

Sheets and Halyards

Inspect all sheets and halyards before you rig your boat and replace them if they are significant signs of wear and chaffing. Pay close attention to eye slices and also examine the shackles.

Hiking strap

Inspect the hiking strap. I have seen several configurations and means to secure and tighten the hiking strap, making it impossible to cover each one in this brief commentary. Just make sure the hiking strap is in very good condition, securely attached and snug. If it breaks while you are hiking it is a fraction of a second before you hit the water and watch your boat sail off without you.

Rudder, Tiller and Centerboard

If you have a wood rudder head then you should give it a good coat or two of marine varnish at least annually. Tillers should be inspected and the dynamic pieces coated lightly with a suitable dry lube product. Check the flexible section of your hiking stick for cracks and excessive wear. Replace if indicated. The aluminum rudder and centerboard should be removed and cleaned at least annually with a good quality cleaner to remove oxidation and light coat of suitable polish. By doing so you will slow the process of oxidation, prevent pitting (which reduces boat speed) and extend the life of your rudder and centerboard. Throughout out the sailing season you should lubricate the pintles and gudgeons to allow for free and clear rudder movement.

Hull

There are two distinct viewpoints of hull care. Some recommend wash and clean only and others include a good coat of polish. Regardless of your viewpoint.....Keep it clean! Make sure your registration numbers are still legible and all required permit stickers are applied properly in the correct location. Make sure you remove the plugs in the ballast tanks when the boat is not on the water. This will prevent stress to the fiberglass due to expansion and contraction caused by extreme temperature change. If your boat has auto bailers installed be sure to check the hardware, screens and gaskets as well as a good coat of dry lubricant.

PFDs

Give your personal flotation devices a good inspection and replace as indicated. A light cleaning with water and bleach will help remove and prevent mildew. Make sure you include a USCG approved throwing device. Some boat cushions qualify. Confirm that the PFD's are correct size and fit for the weight of the person that intends to use them.

Other equipment

Make sure you inspect and replace any other equipment that you normally carry on your boat. This includes but is not limited to; paddle, spinnaker pole, whisker pole, anchor and rode, bow painter, bumpers and bailing devices.

U.S. Coast Guard Required Equipment*

The Sweet Sixteen is classified as a class 1 vessel and required to carry the following equipment. One Type I, II, III or V** PFD for each person on board plus one Type IV PFD available to be thrown. U.S. Coast Guard Approved Whistle or other sound signaling device is also required.

*reference Chapman Piloting & Seamanship, 65th edition

**TypeV must be worn to qualify as required safety equipment

Sails

Sail maintenance and repair will be addressed at a later date.

Now, install the transom plug, put on your PFD, launch your boat and have a great season of sailing.

See ya on the water!

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