

Thanks to my old friend Kevin Whiteman for suggesting I post this blog offering tips for how to use and maintain a boat and motor in saltwater. Below are some of the things I do to fight the corrosive effects of the pervasive and tenacious liquid and to promote the longevity of the equipment I use to make a living.

For one thing, it's a good idea to add a fuel additive to the gasoline one burns in the motor. Since I use a Mercury Opti-Max motor, I use their QuiKleen fuel additive. The product allows the motor to burn the fuel in a cleaner fashion than it would without it, preventing carbon build-up on the interior walls of the cylinders. Mechanics tell me QuiKleen can significantly extend the life of a motor.

Another way to keep an outboard engine running longer in the brine is to rinse the motor soon after it's used each time. I like to crank up the motor and run it while it is sucking water from a hose, rather than just hook it up to the hose and run water through it without turning the engine on. Giving the motor time to heat up the fresh water inside it provides superior cleansing ability. Making sure the "ears" used to seal the water intake are securely wrapped ensures the motor won't overheat. Monitoring the motor's "pee stream" is wise.

Occasionally, it's a good idea to take the cowling off the motor and wash the engine components off with fresh water too. Always perform this maintenance when the engine is cool. Wiping off any crusty build up is sometimes necessary. Using a light corrosion inhibitor like Corrosion X is a good idea too, but laying it on thick is not necessary. Sometimes, I do use more of the stuff around the base of the motor, spraying it directly onto the heads of bolts and other points where I see rust starting to form.

I use Corrosion X on my jackplate and trailer too, especially on the jack and tongue of the trailer. When washing the boat, it's important to devote plenty of time to washing the trailer. Parts of aluminum and galvanized trailers are susceptible to rusting; making sure they are washed with soapy water and rinsed is important. Purchasing a trailer made with all galvanized and/or stainless steel hardware is a good idea too. I've often thought it would be cool to carry a pump and sprayer in the bed of the truck, filled with soapy water. One could rinse the trailer off in the parking lot before embarking on each trip. Most of the damage to a trailer is done in the hours after it's dunked and left to dry.

Covering the boat when it's not in use helps extend its life. Adding fuel stabilizers to the gas tank when the boat is to be left idle for more than a couple of weeks helps prevent the build-up of water in the tank.

To prevent any mishaps with the batteries and electrical components, it's helpful to use a toggle switch which allows for a shut down of the whole system. I leave my toggle switch in the off position all the time when I'm not using the boat. Part of my daily routine of cleaning the boat involves turning the switch off.

I also unplug the trailer lights every time I launch the boat. This is the old school way. I don't like the idea of hot light bulbs plunging into water. Installing LED lights on the trailer will probably negate the necessity of unplugging.

I also regularly spray electronic cleaner like CRC Marine QD Electronic Cleaner on all exposed electrical components on the boat, like the heads of the GPS cords. Additionally, I apply terminal protector to the poles on the batteries.