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POWER & MOTORYACHT

HOW TO
MAKE
A GOOD
BOAT EVEN
BETTER

YARD

THE DRY BILGE MACHINE
TIP OF THE MONTH
DRY BILGE CHECKLIST

AFTER THE GLORY DAYS OF NEW-BOAT SMELL, COME THE SORRY DAYS OF OLD-BOAT SMELL?



1 First step in an installation: Mounting the unit on a convenient bulkhead.



2 Eventually, a wet bilge can cause paint to flake off and metal to rust.



3 A tidy lazarette with no trace of odor courtesy of The Dry Bilge Machine.

That Gloomy Little Secret

Let's investigate a seldom-explored phenomenon that most likely arises from things unseen or at least unobserved. The Frenchies call it *une odeur de vieux bateau* (which translates as “the smell of an old boat”); here we just say, “old-boat smell.” Either way it occasions embarrassment on some vessels, discomfort on others, and downright trouble on more still. Given the name, you'd expect old-boat smell would be the scourge of older boats exclusively. But even today, in our sanitized times, newer boats are subject to the malady too!

Why? The reason's simple enough, according to Al Baurley, an inventor I bumped into at a Florida boat show. Smelliness

onboard, he maintains, arises primarily from the dank waters that lie fallow and foul in a boat's bilges, untouched by the pickups of most bilge pumps, and teeming with bacteria, fungus, mold, and other gloomy possibilities. Even relatively new boats with dripless shaft logs, watertight topsides, and sophisticated air-scrubbers have problems, he says, due to condensate drainage from air-conditioners, leaks in freshwater or sanitary systems, and condensation in the bilge itself.

How serious is this last little detail? Imagine a poorly vented compartment in the bilge of a boat during a hot summer in the sunny South. Daytime here jacks the mercury to 120°F, with the humidity-boosting evaporation of whatever water's present. In the evenings, once the dew

point is passed, condensation drenches everything, engendering a wet stinkiness and corroding metal.



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DRY BILGE CHECKLIST

1 Dry... Once you remove all water from your bilge—either with The Dry Bilge Machine or without—wait a couple of months before repainting. The glass must be thoroughly dry.

2 Track leaks... Because dry, nicely painted bilges offer an unblemished surface, you'll be able to spot and track oil and fluid leaks from your engines, plumbing, and A/C drip pans.

3 Clean up your act... Dry bilges mean you can say goodbye to sometimes-caustic cleaners and other smelly-in-their-own-right products.

Baurley's got a fix however, a patented device he calls "The Dry Bilge Machine." Sold and installed by Arid Bilge Systems, a company he founded, it uses microprocessor technology, along with small-diameter lengths of plastic tubing and a variety of ultra-sensitive pickups, to periodically, automatically, and thoroughly drain all water from one or more bilge compartments. "We're not talking about a substitute for a bilge pump though," he explains. "The point of my system is simply to deal with water your bilge pump or pumps fail to remove."

Baurley's customers tend to be believers. President of Merritt's Marine Supply of Pompano Beach, Allen Pinnell installed the Dry Bilge Machine on his 1998 34-foot fiberglass Merritt sportfisherman two years ago (at left) and cured a pesky *odeur* with finality. The system dried up his lazarette so well that he refurbished it with fresh paint. "And the paint hasn't peeled or blistered since," he enthuses. "In fact, the system's

worked so well that my uncle Roy [Roy Merritt of Merritt's Boat & Engine Works] put one on his own boat *Caliban*."

Everything has a drawback, and the Dry Bilge Machine's is cost: Retail prices range from \$1,880 to \$6,960 for a unit capable of handling nine bilge compartments. The install is an easy DIY project, at least for a small, uncomplicated boat. Simply mount the unit on a bulkhead, route plastic tubing to selected compartment(s), tap into an overboard drain hose, and connect it to a 12-volt power source.

So how does the unit compare with air-handling odor eaters? "Some of the onboard-air-quality technology on the market is great," he says, "but it doesn't address the root of the problem: bilge water." PMY

■ ARID BILGE SYSTEMS

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