

UNDER THE WATERLINE

*What Every Boat Owner Should Know About
the Half of Their Vessel They Never See*

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Written from the deck and the dive line by Jarrett Maryon, founder of Misting Monsoon — professional hull cleaning and marine diving in Pinellas County, Florida.

This handbook is offered as practical education for boat owners. It reflects field experience and general marine-maintenance principles; it is not a substitute for a qualified surveyor, mechanic, or marine electrician on questions specific to your vessel.

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INTRODUCTION

A Note Before We Go Under

Most of what you love about your boat happens above the water. The morning you idle out past the channel markers. The way she settles onto plane and the bow comes down. The quiet at anchor with the engine off, when the only sound is water moving against the hull. That's the boat you know.

But there's another boat — the one below the waterline — and you almost never see it. It's down there right now, working or fouling, protected or corroding, getting faster or getting slower. Everything that happens to that half of your vessel happens out of sight, which is exactly why it gets ignored until it shows up as a fuel bill, a haul-out surprise, or a part that should have lasted years and didn't.

I clean and inspect hulls for a living in Pinellas County waters. A lifetime on the water and over a decade underwater — thousands of hours below the surface — have put my hands on the underside of more boats than I can count: sailboats and center consoles, weekend runabouts and liveaboard cruisers. And I've learned one thing above all: the boats that stay healthy aren't the newest or the most expensive. They're the ones whose owners understand what's happening down there.

That's all this book is. Not a sales pitch and not a scare campaign — an honest, working education in the half of your boat you can't see. I'll show you how marine life finds your hull and what it does once it arrives. How your bottom paint and your anodes fight for you, and when they stop. Where water tries to get into fiberglass and metal, and how you keep it out. What a clean bottom is actually worth in fuel and speed every time you leave the dock. And how the warm Gulf water we're lucky to boat in rewrites every rule the northern boaters play by.

You don't need to become a diver. You need to know what your diver sees — enough to ask the right questions, catch the early signs, and make decisions that protect your investment instead of reacting to it after the fact.

Every chapter ends with a checklist you can come back to, season after season. Dog-ear the pages. Keep it in the cabin. The whole point is that you don't have to remember any of this — you just have to know where to look it up.

Let's go under.

— *Jarrett Maryon, Founder, Misting Monsoon*

Below the Waterline: The Half of Your Boat You Never See

Think about how you actually check on your boat. You walk the dock, look her over, maybe wipe down the topsides and check the lines. Everything you inspect is above the water. The half below the surface gets a glance, maybe, when she's on the trailer or up in the slings at haul-out — a few times a year at most, and usually only when something has already gone wrong.

That blind spot is the single biggest reason underwater problems get expensive. Not because they're hard to fix, but because they grow quietly. A film of slime today is a lawn of weed next month and a crust of barnacles by the end of the season. An anode that's forty percent gone looks fine until it's ninety percent gone and your shaft starts paying the price. None of it announces itself. It just accumulates, out of sight, until it crosses the line from maintenance into repair.

Here's the mindset shift that protects the whole boat: the underwater half is a system, and it is always doing something. It is never static. Every day she sits in the water, biology is colonizing the hull, electrochemistry is working on the metal, and water is pressing against every surface looking for a way in. That's not alarming — it's just physics and biology doing what they do. Your job isn't to stop it. It's to stay ahead of it.

And staying ahead is mostly about attention, not money. The owners I see with the healthiest boats aren't the ones spending the most. They're the ones who know roughly what's happening below at any given time — when the bottom was last cleaned, how old the paint is, what shape the anodes are in. They've turned the invisible half of the boat into something they can picture. Once you can picture it, you can manage it. That's what the rest of this book is going to give you.

A boat that's well cared for below runs better, costs less to operate, holds its value, and surprises you less. That's the whole return on understanding what's down there.

CHECKLIST

Your First Below-the-Waterline Awareness Audit

- ☐ Do you know the date your hull was last cleaned?
- ☐ Do you know how old your current bottom paint is, and what type it is?
- ☐ Do you know what condition your anodes are in right now?
- ☐ Have you ever seen photos or video of your own running gear — prop, shaft, rudder?
- ☐ Do you know how your boat is stored between uses: wet slip, mooring, lift, or trailer?
- ☐ Can you name who would inspect your hull if you wanted it checked this week?
- ☐ If you answered “no” to most of these, that's normal — and it's exactly what this book fixes.

CHAPTER TWO

The Living Sea: Understanding Biofouling

The moment your hull goes in the water, it stops being just a boat and becomes real estate. Warm Gulf water is some of the most productive marine habitat in the country — full of nutrients, plankton, and larvae looking for a clean, stable surface to call home. Your bottom is exactly that surface. What follows is a process marine biologists call fouling succession, and once you understand the stages, you can read your own hull like a calendar.

It starts within hours. A microscopic layer of bacteria and organic molecules settles onto the hull — the slime layer, or biofilm. You can't see it, but you can feel it: that slick, almost snotty film on a hull that's been in the water even a short while. This biofilm isn't just harmless slime. It's the welcome mat. It conditions the surface and makes it easier for the next wave of life to take hold.

Next come the soft foulers. Diatoms and algae move in on top of the biofilm, and within a couple of weeks in warm water you've got visible green or brown growth — the soft “fur” or weed you'll see waving off a neglected hull. It's still easy to remove at this stage, but it's already adding drag and feeding what comes next.

Then come the hard foulers, and this is where it gets serious. Barnacles, tube worms, bryozoans, and in our waters, oysters and other calcareous growth. These animals cement themselves to the hull with some of the strongest natural adhesives known. Once barnacles are established, you're no longer wiping a surface clean — you're removing animals that have bonded to your paint, and aggressive removal can take the paint with them.

The reason this matters so much in the Gulf is temperature. Fouling is a warm-water sport. The biological clock that gives a boater in New England a comfortable margin between cleanings runs much faster here. Water in the eighties for months on end

means the march from clean hull to hard growth can happen in weeks, not seasons. That's not a problem — it's just the trade you make for boating in beautiful warm water, and it's completely manageable once you expect it.

The key insight is this: every stage is easier to handle than the one after it. Slime wipes off. Weed brushes off. Barnacles fight back. The entire strategy of a clean bottom is to keep interrupting the succession early — to keep knocking the hull back to the slime stage before it ever becomes a reef.

CHECKLIST

Reading the Early Warning Signs

- ☐ Run your hand along the hull near the surface — does it feel slick (biofilm) or fuzzy (soft growth)?
- ☐ Look at the waterline stripe and the transom for visible green or brown growth.
- ☐ Check the trim tabs, prop, and underwater metal — fouling often shows up here first.
- ☐ Note any rough or bumpy patches — early hard growth feels like sandpaper or small bumps.
- ☐ Watch your performance — losing a little speed or burning more fuel is often the first sign.
- ☐ Track the calendar — in Gulf summer water, assume fouling is advancing every single week.

Bottom Paint: Your First Line of Defense

If biofouling is the constant pressure, bottom paint — antifouling paint — is your standing defense against it. It works around the clock whether you're using the boat or not, and understanding how it actually works tells you a lot about why it sometimes seems to stop working.

Antifouling paint protects the hull by slowly releasing a biocide — most commonly copper, in the form of cuprous oxide — right at the paint's surface. That thin, biocide-rich layer at the hull-water boundary makes the surface inhospitable to the larvae and spores trying to settle. The paint isn't a force field; it's a chemical discouragement, and like any discouragement, it only works while it stays fresh at the surface.

There are two broad families, and which one you have changes how you should think about it. Ablative paints, also called self-polishing, are designed to wear away slowly as the boat moves through the water, like a bar of soap. As the outer layer wears off, fresh biocide is continuously exposed underneath. The advantage is that they don't build up a dead, spent layer, and they're forgiving if the boat sits. The trade-off is that they physically deplete: every layer that polishes away is gone, and eventually you run out of paint.

Hard paints, usually modified epoxy, stay put. They don't wear away; instead the biocide leaches out of a film that remains on the hull. They can be burnished smooth for performance and they hold up to high speeds and trailering. The trade-off is that once the biocide near the surface is spent, the dead film remains — it can stop protecting while still looking like there's plenty of paint on the boat.

That last point is the one that trips owners up. Paint failure rarely looks like bare hull. A hard paint can be out of gas while still fully coating the boat. An ablative can be worn paper-thin in the high-flow areas — the bow, the leading edges, around the running gear — while looking fine everywhere else. The hull looks painted, so the assumption is that it's protected, right up until the fouling tells you otherwise.

A few practical truths. Copper-free and alternative-biocide paints exist and are worth knowing about, especially as the rules around copper continue to evolve in some areas. Paint's service life is measured in seasons in the water, not years on the calendar — what matters is time submerged and how the boat is used. And no antifouling paint eliminates the need for cleaning; it extends the interval and makes cleaning gentler. Paint and a diver work as a team, not as substitutes.

The goal isn't to become a paint chemist. It's to know what's on your boat, roughly how old it is, and to recognize that “still looks painted” is not the same as “still protecting.”

CHECKLIST

Evaluating Your Current Bottom Paint

- ☐ Do you know whether your paint is ablative (self-polishing) or hard (modified epoxy)?
- ☐ Do you know the brand, and ideally the date it was last applied?
- ☐ Check the high-flow areas — bow, leading edges, running gear — for thin or worn-through paint.
- ☐ Look for fouling that returns faster than it used to — a sign the biocide is depleting.
- ☐ Note the color — many abrasives use a signal coat that shows when you're nearing bare hull.

- ☐ Ask your diver for their read on remaining paint life at your next cleaning.
- ☐ Plan repaint timing around hours in the water and use, not just the calendar.

Hull Integrity: Blisters, Osmosis, and What Water Does to Fiberglass

Most modern boats are fiberglass, and fiberglass is wonderfully durable — but it isn't completely waterproof, and that surprises a lot of owners. The outermost layer of your hull, the gelcoat, is a barrier coat. It's there to keep water out of the structural laminate underneath. It does that job well, but it's a barrier, not a seal, and over years of immersion, water can slowly work its way in.

When it does, you sometimes get osmotic blistering. Here's the mechanism without the chemistry lecture: tiny amounts of water permeate the gelcoat and reach small pockets in the laminate where water-soluble compounds were left over from manufacturing. Water is drawn to those pockets, dissolves the compounds, and creates a more concentrated solution inside than the relatively pure water outside. Osmosis keeps pulling more water toward that concentration, pressure builds, and the gelcoat bulges outward into a blister.

The word “blister” makes people nervous, so let's keep it in proportion. The large majority of blisters are cosmetic — shallow, confined to the gelcoat layer, more an eyesore than a structural threat. They're worth addressing, but they are not an emergency and they don't mean your hull is failing. What you want to distinguish is depth: blisters confined to the gelcoat are a finish issue; blisters reaching into the structural laminate are the ones that deserve a professional's eye and a real repair plan.

You'll usually first see blisters at haul-out — small raised bumps on the hull, sometimes weeping fluid when opened. A scattering of small ones is common, especially on older boats that live in the water year-round, which describes a lot of Florida boats. What matters is the trend: are there a few, or many? Are they shallow, or

deep? Are they stable year to year, or spreading? That trend line tells you far more than any single blister does.

Beyond blisters, the broader idea is moisture intrusion. A hull that spends its whole life in warm water is, very slowly, taking on a little moisture in the laminate. This is normal and usually harmless, but it's why letting a boat dry out periodically — and keeping the gelcoat and bottom coating in good shape — is genuinely good for long-term hull health. A barrier coat under your antifouling paint, applied at the right time, is one of the best long-term investments you can make in a hull you plan to keep.

None of this should worry you. Fiberglass hulls routinely last decades. The point is simply to look, to know the difference between a cosmetic blister and a structural one, and to watch the trend — so you're making informed decisions instead of being surprised in the slings.

CHECKLIST

Inspecting Your Hull for Blistering and Gelcoat Damage

- ☐ At every haul-out, walk the entire hull and count visible blisters.
- ☐ Note the size — pinhead and dime-sized blisters are usually cosmetic; large ones warrant a closer look.
- ☐ Press on suspect areas — soft or spongy spots deserve a professional opinion.
- ☐ Photograph problem areas so you can compare them year over year.
- ☐ Check for crazing, cracks, or chips in the gelcoat, especially along the keel and chines.
- ☐ Ask whether a barrier coat is right for your hull at your next bottom job.

- ☐ Distinguish a few stable cosmetic blisters (monitor) from many or deep blisters (act).

The Silent Current: Galvanic Corrosion and Sacrificial Anodes

This is the chapter that protects your most expensive underwater hardware, and it's the one most owners understand the least. The good news: the core idea is simple, and once it clicks, the maintenance is easy.

Put two different metals in seawater and connect them, and you've built a battery. That's not a metaphor — it's literally how a battery works. Seawater is an electrolyte, and dissimilar metals sit at different electrical potentials, so current flows between them. The catch is that the current flow consumes one of the metals. The less noble metal gives up its material to protect the more noble one. This is galvanic corrosion, and on your boat the vulnerable metals are the valuable ones: your bronze prop, your stainless shaft, your underwater fittings.

The fix is elegant. You bolt on a chunk of metal that's even less noble than anything you want to protect — a sacrificial anode — and let the corrosion eat that instead. As long as the anode is there and properly connected, it's first in line to be consumed, and your prop and shaft are spared. The anode is supposed to disappear. That's its entire job. A half-gone anode isn't a problem; it's an anode doing exactly what you paid for.

The maintenance, then, comes down to two things: having the right anodes, and replacing them before they're gone. Get the metal right for your water. The traditional choice in saltwater has been zinc — which is why boaters still call them “zincs” out of habit — but aluminum anodes have become the preferred all-around choice for many boats, because they protect well in both salt and brackish water, and a lot of Florida boating happens in exactly that brackish, river-and-bay transition zone. Magnesium anodes are for fresh water only and will be eaten alive in salt. Using the wrong

anode for your water is one of the most common and most avoidable mistakes I see.

Then there's the troublemaker: stray current corrosion. This is different from galvanic, and it's faster and nastier. Stray current happens when actual electrical current — from a wiring fault on your own boat, from a neighbor's boat leaking through the water at the dock, or from a shore-power problem — finds a path through your underwater metal. In a marina full of boats sharing the same water, a poorly wired vessel two slips down can accelerate corrosion on everyone around it. If your anodes are disappearing far faster than they should, or your metal is corroding despite good anodes, stray current is a prime suspect and worth a professional electrical check.

You don't need to diagnose all this yourself. You need to know that your anodes are cheap insurance protecting expensive hardware, that they're meant to be consumed, that they have to be the right type and properly bonded, and that anode loss happening too fast is a signal worth investigating rather than just replacing and forgetting.

CHECKLIST

Anode Inspection and Stray-Current Spot Check

- ☐ Know which anodes your boat has — shaft, prop nut, trim tabs, hull — and where each one is.
- ☐ Confirm you're using the right metal for your water (aluminum or zinc for salt and brackish; never magnesium in salt).
- ☐ Replace anodes when roughly fifty percent consumed — don't wait until they're gone.
- ☐ At each cleaning, have the anodes checked and note how fast they're wearing.
- ☐ Flag unusually fast anode loss — it can signal a stray-current problem.

- ☐ Check that anodes are tight and making clean metal-to-metal contact (a loose anode protects nothing).
- ☐ If corrosion appears despite good anodes, have your boat's bonding and shore-power wiring checked.

Running Gear: Props, Shafts, and the Physics of a Foul Bottom

Your running gear — the prop, shaft, strut, and rudder — is where a clean bottom pays you back the most, because these are the surfaces where small amounts of fouling cause outsized problems. A little growth on a broad, flat hull is one thing. The same growth on a spinning propeller is another thing entirely.

Start with the propeller, because it's the most sensitive surface on the whole boat. A prop is a precision airfoil. Its blades are shaped and balanced to move water with as little wasted energy as possible, and that performance depends on the blade surface being smooth and the shape being exactly right. Now coat that blade with even a thin layer of slime, and you've roughened a surface that was engineered to be glass-smooth. Let barnacles establish on it, and you've changed the actual shape of the airfoil and added turbulence right where the blade is trying to grip the water. The result is a prop that has to spin harder to do the same work — more fuel, more engine load, less speed, less bite when you need it. Fouling on a prop hurts you out of all proportion to its size.

The shaft and strut matter for related reasons. A fouled shaft adds drag in the high-flow water behind the boat, and growth around the strut and cutless bearing can disturb the smooth water delivery the prop depends on. The rudder, being a control surface, loses crispness when it's fouled — the boat feels less responsive, and you're dragging a rough plate through the water the entire time you run.

There's also a wear angle here, not just a performance one. Marine growth on a shaft can accelerate wear on the cutless bearing and shaft seal. Barnacles inside a strut or around a bearing don't just slow you down; they grind. Keeping the running gear clean isn't

only about speed and fuel — it's about not turning a cleaning issue into a parts-replacement issue.

This is why running gear deserves its own attention, separate from the hull. The hull is big and forgiving; the running gear is small, high-value, and unforgiving. When a diver cleans your boat, the prop and shaft should get careful, deliberate attention — not a quick pass on the way to the bigger surfaces. And because these are the surfaces that foul fast and cost the most when neglected, they're the best early-warning indicators you have. If the prop is growing a beard, the rest of the bottom is telling you something too.

CHECKLIST

Running-Gear Condition Check

- ☐ Have your prop blades inspected for slime, growth, and any nicks or dings at each cleaning.
- ☐ Make sure the prop is being cleaned to a smooth finish, not just knocked free of barnacles.
- ☐ Check the shaft for growth and the shaft anode for wear.
- ☐ Inspect the strut and cutless-bearing area for fouling that could affect the bearing.
- ☐ Look at the rudder and trim tabs — control surfaces foul and lose effectiveness too.
- ☐ Pay attention to handling and vibration — new vibration can mean fouling or a dinged prop.
- ☐ Treat the running gear as the canary: heavy growth here means the whole bottom needs attention.

Through-Hulls and Seacocks: The Holes That Keep You Floating

Every boat has holes in the bottom on purpose. They feed cooling water to your engine, supply your air conditioning and washdown, and drain your sinks and bilge. These through-hull fittings, and the valves that control them — the seacocks — are some of the most important hardware on the boat. And because they live below the surface and out of sight, they're also among the most neglected. Two things matter here: making sure the water you want keeps flowing in, and making sure the water you don't want stays out.

Start with cooling. Most boats are raw-water cooled, meaning the engine pulls seawater in through an intake to carry heat away. That intake is a through-hull, usually protected by a strainer, and it's a prime fouling target. Marine growth loves a steady flow of water, and a raw-water intake offers exactly that. When the intake or strainer fouls up, the engine gets less cooling water than it needs, and the result is rising temperatures — the kind of overheating that can leave you shut down on the water or, worse, do real harm to an engine. A surprising number of “overheating” service calls trace back to nothing more than a fouled intake or a strainer packed with growth and debris.

Then there are the seacocks themselves. A seacock is the valve that lets you shut off a through-hull — to service the plumbing, or to close off a failed hose before it can sink the boat. That's not dramatic; it's the basic reason seacocks exist. But a seacock only protects you if it actually works, and seacocks that are never exercised seize up. I've found plenty that hadn't been turned in years and wouldn't budge — which means in an emergency they'd have been useless. A seacock you can't close is just a hole with a handle.

The fittings matter too. Bronze and Marelon, a reinforced composite, are the proper materials for seacocks; both are built to live underwater for the long haul. What you're watching for is corrosion on metal fittings, any pink or weakened look to bronze (a sign it's losing its good metal), stiffness in operation, and the condition of the hoses and clamps attached to them. These connections are the ones you least want to fail, precisely because of where they are.

None of this requires you to become a plumber. It requires you to know your boat has these fittings, to keep the intakes clear so your engine breathes, and to exercise your seacocks regularly so they're ready when you need them. A few minutes of attention here protects against the two outcomes nobody wants: an overheated engine and an uncontrolled leak.

CHECKLIST

Through-Hull, Strainer, and Seacock Inspection

- ☐ Locate and count every through-hull on your boat — know what each one does.
- ☐ Keep raw-water intakes and strainers clear of growth and debris.
- ☐ Open and inspect raw-water strainers regularly, and clean them out.
- ☐ Exercise every seacock — open and close it fully — on a regular schedule so it doesn't seize.
- ☐ Inspect bronze fittings for corrosion or a pink, weakened appearance.
- ☐ Check the hoses and double clamps on every underwater fitting.
- ☐ Have intakes and seacocks checked as part of your underwater service, and address stiffness early.

Speed, Fuel, and Money: The True Cost of a Dirty Bottom

Up to now we've talked about what happens beneath the surface. This chapter is about what it costs you — in dollars, in fuel, in time, and in resale — because once you see the economics, the maintenance decision tends to make itself.

Start with drag, because drag is where it all comes from. A clean hull slips through the water; a fouled hull has to drag every bit of that roughness along with it. The relationship isn't gentle, either. Even a thin film of slime measurably increases the friction between hull and water, and that friction is the single biggest force your engine fights at cruising speed. The dirtier the bottom, the harder the boat has to work to go the same speed.

Put that in terms you feel at the fuel dock. Studies of hull fouling consistently show that even light slime can raise fuel consumption noticeably — often in the rough neighborhood of ten percent — and heavy fouling, the barnacle-crust kind, can push fuel penalties much higher, with real-world figures climbing well past a third more fuel for a badly fouled hull. I'll be careful here: the exact numbers depend on the boat, the speed, and how bad the fouling is, so treat them as the shape of the problem rather than a promise. But the direction is never in doubt — fouling always costs fuel, and it costs more the worse it gets.

It doesn't stop at fuel. A fouled bottom costs you speed and range — you go slower at the same throttle, and you can't go as far on a tank. It costs you engine life, because an engine working harder against drag runs hotter and wears faster. And it costs you time, because a boat that won't get on plane cleanly or hold cruising speed is simply less pleasant to own. Every one of these is a real cost, even though none of them shows up as a single obvious bill.

Then there's resale, which is where neglect down below quietly compounds. A surveyor hauls the boat and looks at exactly the things this book has covered — the bottom, the running gear, the through-hulls, the blistering, the corrosion. A boat with a documented history of regular underwater care surveys clean and supports its asking price. A boat with a neglected bottom, fouled gear, and wasted anodes raises questions in a survey, and questions in a survey become deductions on the price. The cost of neglect doesn't disappear when you sell — it gets subtracted from the check.

Now weigh all of that against the cost of prevention. Regular hull cleaning and the occasional bottom job are predictable, modest, scheduled expenses. The costs of neglect — extra fuel on every trip, premature parts replacement, an overheated engine, a soft survey — are larger, less predictable, and they tend to arrive all at once. The math almost always favors staying ahead. A clean bottom isn't an expense you're absorbing; it's a series of smaller expenses you're choosing instead of bigger ones.

CHECKLIST

Estimating What Your Bottom Condition Is Costing You

- ☐ Track your fuel burn — a creeping increase at the same speeds often means a fouling hull.
- ☐ Note your top speed and cruise speed over time — losing them gradually is a fouling signal.
- ☐ Watch your engine temperatures — running hotter can tie back to fouling and drag.
- ☐ Compare the cost of regular cleaning against what you spend on extra fuel each season.
- ☐ Factor in resale — keep records of underwater maintenance to protect survey value.

- ☐ Add up the hidden costs (fuel, wear, lost time) rather than judging cleaning by its price alone.
- ☐ Remember the pattern: prevention is small and scheduled; neglect is large and all at once.

The Maintenance Rhythm: Building Your Underwater Schedule

Everything in this book comes down to rhythm — doing the right small things on the right schedule so the big problems never form. The challenge is that no single schedule fits every boat, because the right interval depends on your water, your storage, and how you use the boat. What I can give you is how to think it through, and a realistic starting point for our Gulf conditions.

The first factor is water temperature, and here Florida is in a category of its own. Warm water grows fouling fast. The same boat that might go two or three months between cleanings up north can need attention monthly — or even more often in the peak of summer — in our warm, productive Gulf and bay water. This isn't a knock on Florida boating; it's simply the trade for boating in beautiful warm water year-round. The boaters who do well here set their expectations to the local clock instead of fighting it.

The second factor is how your boat is stored, and this changes everything. A boat in a wet slip is in the water full-time, fouling continuously, and needs the most regular underwater attention — this is the classic case for scheduled dive cleaning. A boat on a mooring is similar. But a boat that's trailered or kept on a lift dries out between uses, and that drying is itself a powerful antifouling tool — most fouling organisms can't survive being lifted out and dried in the sun. A lift or trailer boat fouls dramatically slower than a slip boat of the same type in the same marina. If you have the option to dry-store, you're already winning half the battle.

The third factor is use. A boat that runs regularly keeps water moving over the hull, which slows soft fouling somewhat and helps abrasive paint do its job. A boat that sits at the dock for weeks at a time in warm water is a sitting target — a stable, undisturbed

surface is exactly what fouling larvae are looking for. Counterintuitively, the boat that barely gets used can need more underwater attention than the one that runs every weekend.

Layered on top of dive cleaning is the longer cycle: the haul-out and bottom job. This is where the boat comes out, the bottom gets inspected properly, the paint is refreshed or renewed, the running gear is serviced, the anodes are replaced, and the through-hulls are gone over. Depending on your paint and use, this typically lands somewhere in the once-a-year to once-every-couple-of-years range. The regular dive cleanings keep the boat healthy between haul-outs; the haul-out resets the whole system.

The practical move is to set a default interval and then let the boat tell you whether it's right. Start with a schedule appropriate to your storage and our climate, watch how fouled the boat actually is at each cleaning, and adjust. If the diver is finding heavy growth every time, tighten the interval. If the boat is consistently clean, you may be able to stretch it. The schedule serves the boat — not the other way around.

CHECKLIST

Your Season-by-Season Underwater Maintenance Calendar

- ☐ Identify your storage type (wet slip, mooring, lift, or trailer) — it sets your baseline interval.
- ☐ For wet-slip boats in Gulf water, plan on roughly monthly hull cleaning as a starting point.
- ☐ Tighten the interval in summer, when warm water accelerates fouling.
- ☐ If you dry-store on a lift or trailer, lean on the natural antifouling that drying provides.
- ☐ Don't let a lightly used boat fool you — sitting still in warm water fouls fast.

- ☐ Schedule your haul-out and bottom job on a regular cycle (typically yearly to every couple of years).
- ☐ Let the boat calibrate the schedule — adjust based on how much growth your diver actually finds.

Your Diver and You: A Partnership Below the Surface

For most owners, the person who knows the underwater half of their boat best isn't them — it's their diver. A good hull service is the closest thing you have to a regular set of eyes down below, and the relationship works best when you understand what a complete service includes and what to look for in the person providing it. This last chapter is about being a smart customer for the one part of your boat you can't easily check yourself.

First, know what a real hull service covers. Cleaning the bottom is the headline, but it shouldn't be the whole story. A complete service touches everything we've covered in this book: the hull cleaned appropriately for its paint type — gently enough not to strip an ablative, thoroughly enough to actually remove growth; the running gear given careful, individual attention; the anodes inspected and their wear noted; the through-hulls and intakes checked; and a look for anything developing — early blistering, corrosion, a loose fitting, a dinged prop. The cleaning keeps the boat fast; the inspection keeps the boat from surprising you. You want both.

Second, insist on reporting. This is the single biggest thing that separates a professional hull service from someone who just scrubs and leaves. You can't see your own bottom, so the value of a diver who photographs or videos what they find, tells you the condition of your anodes, and flags what's developing is enormous. That reporting is what turns the invisible half of your boat into something you can actually manage. A diver who surfaces and says “all clean, see you next month” with nothing to show is asking you to take the most important part of the job on faith.

Third, know what to ask before you hire. Are they insured? What exactly does a cleaning include — is anode replacement and running-gear attention part of it, or extra? Do they provide a report or photos? How do they handle finding a problem — do they just clean around it, or do they tell you? Do they clean ablative and hard paint differently, and do they know the difference? You're not interrogating anyone; you're making sure the person responsible for the half of your boat you can't see actually understands what they're protecting.

And know the red flags. Cleaning so aggressive it visibly removes paint along with growth — that's your protection going into the water. No reporting, ever. Vagueness about anodes or running gear. A price so low it only makes sense if corners are being cut, on a boat where the corners are the expensive parts. The cheapest scrub is no bargain if it shortens your paint life or misses a problem that grows into a repair.

The owners who get the most out of their boats treat their diver as a partner, not a vendor. They want the photos. They ask the questions. They act on what gets flagged before it becomes expensive. Do that, and the underwater half of your boat stops being a mystery and a worry, and becomes just another well-managed system — protected, understood, and quietly doing its job every time you leave the dock.

CHECKLIST

Vetting a Hull Service and Knowing What to Expect

- ☐ Confirm the diver is insured and clear on what each cleaning includes.
- ☐ Make sure running gear and anodes are part of the service, not an afterthought.
- ☐ Require reporting — photos or video and a condition summary after each visit.

- ☐ Confirm they know your paint type and clean appropriately for it.
- ☐ Ask how they handle finding a problem — you want it reported, not cleaned around.
- ☐ Watch for red flags: paint-stripping cleaning, no reporting, suspiciously low pricing.
- ☐ Act on what gets flagged — early attention is the whole point of regular inspection.

Coming Back Up

You started this book knowing your boat from the waterline up. You're finishing it understanding the half you never see — and that changes everything about how you'll care for her.

You know now that the underwater half of your boat is a living, working system that's never standing still. You know how fouling colonizes a hull in stages, and why our warm Gulf water runs that clock fast. You know what your bottom paint is actually doing, and why “still looks painted” isn't the same as “still protecting.” You know the difference between a cosmetic blister and a structural one. You understand why your anodes are meant to disappear, and why losing them too fast is a signal worth chasing. You know why a fouled prop costs you out of all proportion to its size, why your seacocks need exercising, and what a dirty bottom really costs you in fuel and at resale. And you know how to set a maintenance rhythm, and how to be a smart partner to the diver who keeps watch below for you.

None of this asks you to become a marine biologist or a diver. It asks you to do one thing: stop treating the underwater half of your boat as out of sight and out of mind. Picture it. Stay curious about it. Ask what's happening down there. That single shift in attention is what separates the boats that quietly hold their value and run their best from the ones that surprise their owners in the slings.

Keep this book on the boat. Come back to the checklists whenever you need them — that's what they're for. You don't have to carry any of this in your head. You just have to know where to look, and to look before the water makes the decision for you.

Take care of the half you can't see, and the half you love will take care of you for a long time.

— *Jarrett Maryon*

ABOUT

Jarrett Maryon & Misting Monsoon

Jarrett Maryon is the founder of Misting Monsoon, a professional hull cleaning and marine diving service based in Pinellas County, Florida. He works the waters of Tampa Bay, the beaches, and the surrounding Gulf, keeping boats clean, protected, and running their best below the surface.

Misting Monsoon provides scheduled hull cleaning, running-gear and anode service, through-hull and seacock inspection, and detailed reporting — so owners always know the condition of the half of their boat they can't see.

This handbook reflects what Jarrett sees underwater every working day. It's offered in the same spirit as the work itself: to help boat owners understand, protect, and get the most out of their vessels.

Misting Monsoon

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