

Setting Sail

Equal time to our wind driven friends.

The local racing season is about to begin and the winter winds are on the way. Before you embark on your next cruise or assemble the crew for that club regatta you might want to check a few things that may have been neglected.

On a larger percentage of sailboats the heavy ballast keel is attached to the hull with a few large bolts. On survey I often find these important fasteners overlooked. They are very important, in fact critical to performance, safety and the integrity of your hull. The best time to check the tightness of your keel bolts is when the boat is blocked ashore for repainting of the hull or other service. They should be checked every time the boat is hauled. To determine the correct torque you should consult your owner's manual or call the boat builder directly. In many cases contacting the builder is not an option. That being the case, simply measure the bolt, determine the material it is constructed of, (commonly 316 stainless steel) and Google a torque - table for the appropriate tightness. I would suggest having the yard perform this task because it usually requires some large special tools and doesn't consume that much time. (\$\$\$) Failure to maintain the keel tightness can allow cracks in the stub joint to form and the bedding to fail. With the stub cracking moisture may be allowed into the gap that will eventually lead to crevasse corrosion of the keel bolts. In addition in the event of even a soft grounding a loose keel will shift and point load on one edge or another instead of transferring the impact to the entire hull. This point loading will lead to longitudinal cracking of the hull fore and aft of the keel stub and cracking of the interior bilge liner as well. So it's important, service your keel.

Now for your winches. If you don't yet know how to service your sheet and halyard winches I am very disappointed in you. They should be stripped, cleaned and lubricated every season. A single strand of sailcloth can jam a winch just when it's needed most. In many cases the drum is secured to the shaft by only a small circlip. That clip deserves inspection. Here is the trick, pay attention. All you need is some basic hand tools, a bucket ½ full of diesel, winch grease some newspaper and rags and a cooler of beer. I also recommend having some sand paper and varnish ready so the spouse can do bright work while you sit in the cockpit drinking beer and cleaning the winches. 9. Download a parts diagram off the Internet and order all new circlips and a spare set of springs and pawls. The springs and pawls are for just in case, you might need them so better to be prepared. Only strip one winch at a time. Take it right down to a bare spindle and put all the pieces in the diesel bucket. Use a paintbrush to clean off the parts and then organize them on the newspaper in the order of assembly. Don't get crazy with the grease; usually

just a thin coat is sufficient. Make sure you grease all the screws too. Part of the reason for annual servicing is to keep the fasteners from corroding. If left too long the screws may seize or break off making a simple winch repair a big ordeal. When your winches are all clean, greased and assembled with new clips you will be amazed at how smooth they run.

I have found the people at Florida Rigging and Hydraulics to be very knowledgeable and helpful. These guys know there stuff and their prices are very fair. 800-718-1649 <http://www.rigginghydraulics.com/> Remember, the wind is free so that leaves more money for maintenance!

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