



Leaky Boats - Lets Fix it!

Myth and Reality

There was a time some years ago when it was thought that if your boat didn't carry some water inside it was built too heavy. The sight of drain plugs opened at the lake side with a steady stream of water firing out was nothing to worry about.....Or was it?

It is no secret that in the early days of radio sailing, especially in events held in open water, breakdowns due to radio failure was all too common, due on the greater part to leaking boats. Poor hatches that would not seal, through deck blocks dragging through the water when a boat heeled, internal rudder shafts that were far too short, the list of reasons goes on.

Thankfully not everyone saw leaking boats as acceptable, with the ability to complete events without unnecessary break downs every bit as important as producing a fast package.

A leading light in this case was Craig Smith in Australia with his immaculate build of the Gary Cameron designed TS2 in the mid to late 90's. Not only a fast boat that took World and multiple national honours, but one that was produced in large numbers of a quality that set the standard for others to follow. A top level package that didn't leak, put a line in the sand for any manufacturer to be compared against, being widely reflected in the low breakdown rate at challenging events. There was no longer an excuse and we thank you Craig for standards that remain true still today.

Moving forward for varying reasons unfortunately it is not uncommon for older and some newer builds to leak a small amount of water in extreme open conditions. An acceptable small amount of water would be maybe a teaspoon or two after a couple of races and certainly not require the use of a rubber bung for regular draining.

If you are experiencing more than this then the source needs to be found and fixed ASAP. While an easy answer would be just to send the boat back to the builder, most times, often small a leak can be fixed with the minimum of skill required in a very short amount of time.

Find and Fix

- Firstly, set your boat up ready to sail with all patches on (less fin and rig). Mix up some washing liquid in water to a foamy consistency. Now gently apply bubbled soap over a few fittings at a time and carefully blow air in through your drain hole. Any leaks will be seen through bubbling local to the problem.

If nothing is found, then continue over all fittings that have been fastened until a leak is found. If a leak is found at a fitting this can be solved easily with some epoxy glue carefully applied to the underside of the deck local to the leak. Re-test when dry.



- Secondly, if nothing is found through deck fittings, we must check the fin case and mast tube. Put a generous amount of bubbles to cover the mast tube on the deck and blow air in again. If the bubbles raise then a mast tube leak is the cause. If not proceed to fin case. Cover the fin box on the bottom of the hull with some packing tape. Now place bubbles over keel bolt hole and blow air once more. If this shows a leak then a fin case pin hole may be the issue. Pin holes can be easily fixed with a little thickened resin on the tip of a cotton bud/brush/finger locally worked into the area.

- Dependent on just how much water is inside your hull over a period of time, this would help determine how bad the issue but the above may help to diagnose the smallest of problems saving time away from the water.

Of course if you feel the problem to be sufficiently bad enough with excessive leaking or beyond the realms of an easy fix locally, you should contact your builder/commercial supplier for rectification.

- If you are experiencing some days with not a drop inside and others with excessive water, without any change in deck patch integrity, then you may have created a vacuum situation where water is being sucked inside your hull and requires a Breather Tube. Go to our page on Breather Tubes for more information on this or our Boat Maintenance page on how to best manage leaks at an event.
- We would not ever advise to look for a source of leak by filling the inside of a lightweight build with water. You will very rarely nail down the source of the leak and risk real damage to the internal structure in handling.

While this may not cover every aspect of boat maintenance, if you follow these guidelines you will get far more enjoyment from your sailing with more time at events spent socialising or focussed on the race course than having your head down in a boat.

Cheers
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