

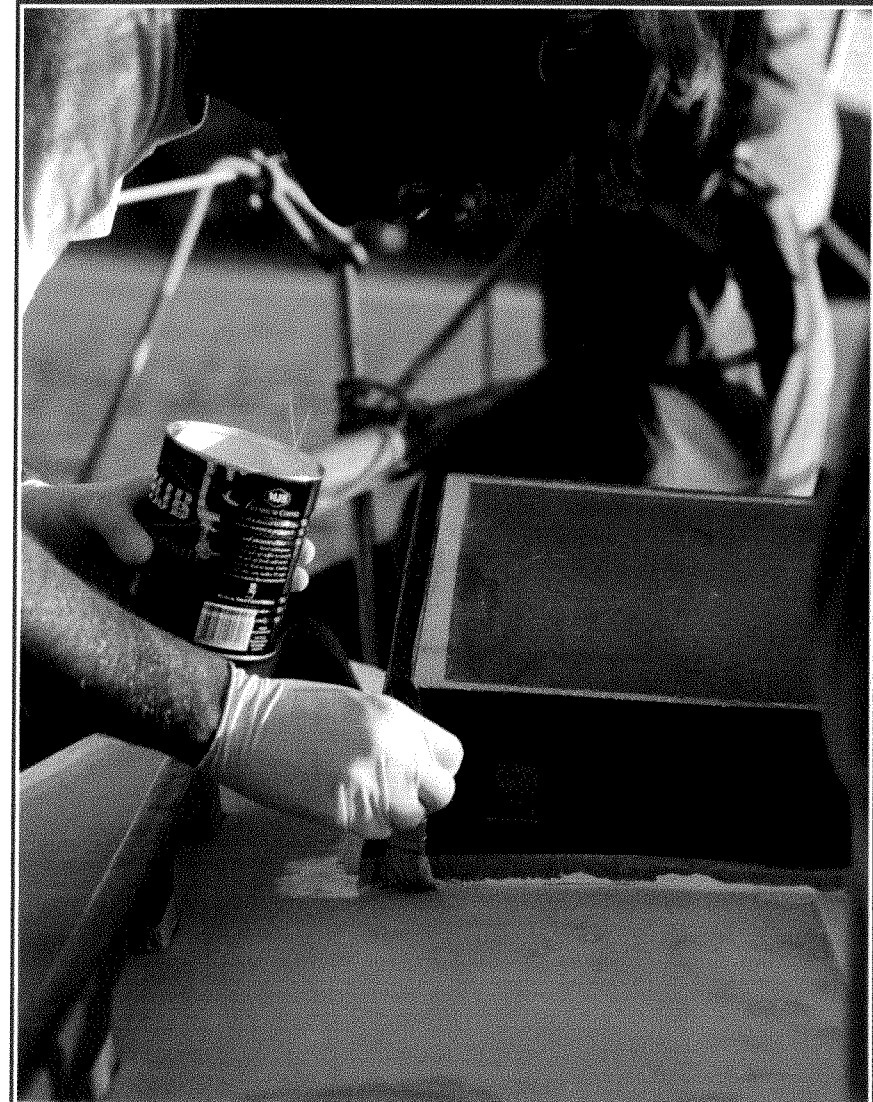
Repainting your deck

The deck is as important as the hull. Repainting is one option for enhancing its appearance and creating an antiskid surface underfoot. Story and photos by Evan Gatehouse and Diane Selkirk

Look at any older boat that has seen a lot of miles and you'll notice the deck has suffered the inevitable dings and dents. Repairing and refinishing a deck may seem like a job for an expert, but it really isn't that difficult. The key to a successful renovation is doing all the required repairs prior to applying any paint. Pay careful attention to surface preparation, and choose the correct tools and methods for the job.

WASHING

Remove all lines and as much equipment as you can. Then wash and scrub the deck to get rid of all accumulated salt and dirt. Give extra attention to the toerail and remaining deck fittings—dirt trapped underneath fittings will inevitably show up at the worst possible time. Keep in mind that a simple wash does not remove wax, grease, or oil; neither repair materials nor paint can bond to them. Use a degreasing solvent such as xylene,



Painting the deck of a tired fiberglass boat greatly improves its appearance

which evaporates more slowly than acetone.

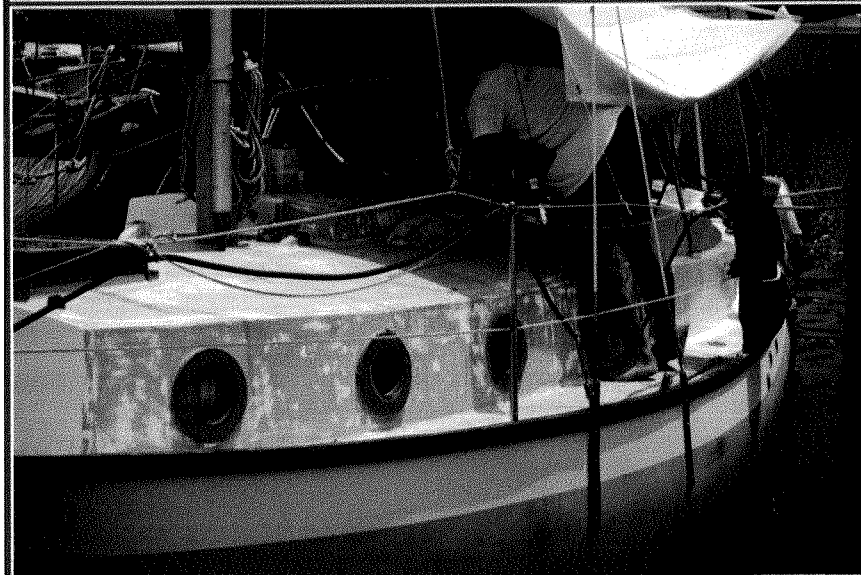
Wear heavy gloves, and use clean white rags to wipe down small areas of the deck. Wipe from the cleaned area into the next section, using a new area of the cloth for each part. Be careful not to wipe back into a previously cleaned area, and change your rags frequently to avoid recontamination. After you have completely cleaned the deck, test for wax residue by lightly spraying the surface with water. Any areas that show

water beading need additional treatment.

PATCHING

Dents and dings come with sailing. Whether caused by a dropped anchor in a bouncy anchorage, a piece of hardware that was removed, or delamination, every older deck has a variety of scars and blemishes that you'll need to repair before paint is applied.

To repair stress cracks in gelcoat you



Top: Thorough preparation is the key to success
Bottom: Rigging a shade over the boat keeps the early-morning dew off

need first to open up the cracks so they can be filled properly. Using a Dremel or similar rotary tool will make the job go quickly. Use a cone-shaped grinding attachment slightly wider than the crack to gently grind away the old material and create a shallow V.

For larger damaged areas and deep gouges, grind or sand away as little material as possible and fair the edges. Filling compounds have some shrinkage, and hard edges may lead to future hairline cracks.

When you've finished grinding, clean away all dust and wipe down the area with a solvent. Although they cost more,

premixed fillers such as 3M's Premium Marine Filler are easier to work with and cure faster than mix-it-yourself epoxies. Mix small batches of filler and apply with an oversized flexible spreader. Spread evenly over the void, ensuring there are no air spaces or low spots. Over-fill the area so you can sand it smooth when it's dry. If the void is deeper than $\frac{3}{8}$ ", use two or more thin applications of filler, allowing each layer to cure before applying the next.

SANDING

When the filler has hardened, sand the filled areas with 80-grit paper to knock

down the high spots. Refill if you remove too much. Pay careful attention to any holes or cracks that go below the surface of the gelcoat and fiberglass skin. Holes left when deck hardware is removed are often filled with sealant and then ignored—until they start to leak. Simply fairing these areas may hide a potential problem. It's important to drill out the holes and fill them with thickened epoxy to seal the core properly and protect against leaks. Sand the entire area fair when the epoxy has cured.

If you see localized cracking that seems to have no clear origin, check for flexing in the deck. Flexing can occur if the deck wasn't constructed strongly enough or if the core is delaminated (see "Delaminated-Core Repair," page 32). If flexing is limited to one spot, you might want to consider reinforcing the deck locally.

There are several options for refinishing an anti-skid surface. The easiest is to simply repaint with anti-skid deck paint. This technique is best for decks that were previously finished in this manner or that needed very few repairs and still have a distinct molded anti-skid pattern. Use bronze wool to roughen up molded anti-skid you are going to repaint. Never use standard steel wool from the hardware store, as the metal fibers that are inevitably left behind will soon rust and show through any paint.

By the time we had completed the various small repairs on our 1977 Fortune 30, her deck looked like a patchwork of filled areas. Simply repainting it with anti-skid (which we had tried earlier) was not going to work, and we didn't want to use an adhesive-backed deck covering. We removed the old molded anti-skid with 24-grit sandpaper on a rented 6" random orbital sander. Then we painted on a new anti-skid surface. The project was time-consuming and labor-intensive, but the end result looks great and is easy to touch up.

TIME TO PRIME

Priming the deck serves three purposes. First, with the entire deck painted in a single flat color, it's easy to see any imperfections that were missed while filling, fairing, and applying anti-skid. Second, primer paints contain more solids than finishing paints and fill light scratches too small to sand out.

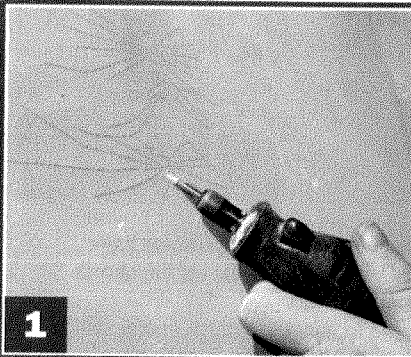
Finally, the primer prepares the gelcoat to accept paint. Gelcoat is porous, and paint may crater if applied directly.

Prepare to paint by ensuring everything is as dust-free as possible. Wash the boat thoroughly—including deck and rigging—and spray the ground to keep the dust down. Use a good-quality extended-life masking tape to

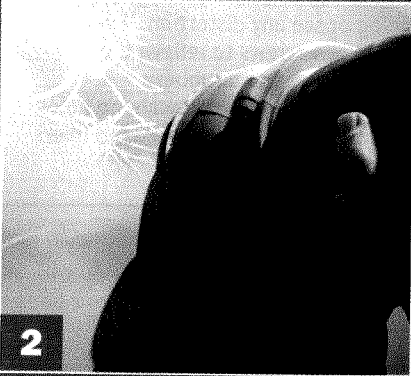
mask off the area to be painted as well as any hardware within the painting area if you don't want to remove it. Wipe down the deck with clean rags, using a solvent compatible with your paint. It is important to keep primer adequately thinned so that it goes on smoothly. Keep small quantities in your paint tray, and keep the lid on the can

to prevent evaporation.

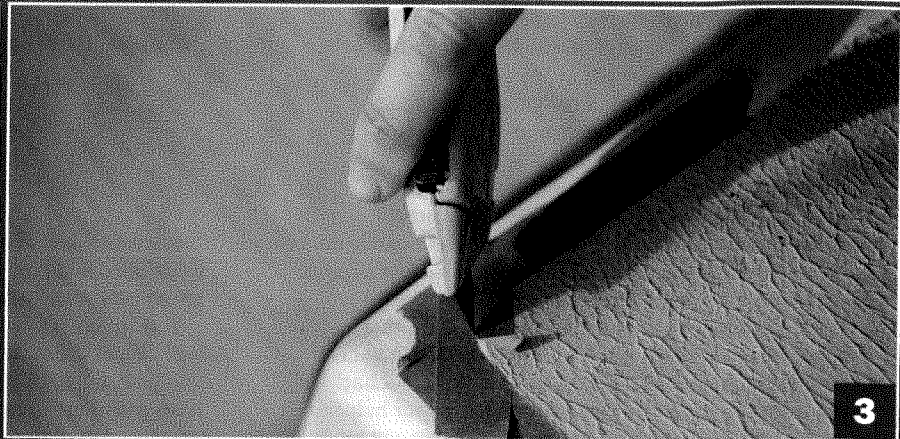
It's easiest to paint with a partner so you can roll and tip the paint. Using a high-density 3" × 1/4" foam roller suitable for solvent-based paints, lightly load the roller and apply a thin coat of paint over a small area. As the paint is rolled on, the second person follows with a good-quality foam brush to



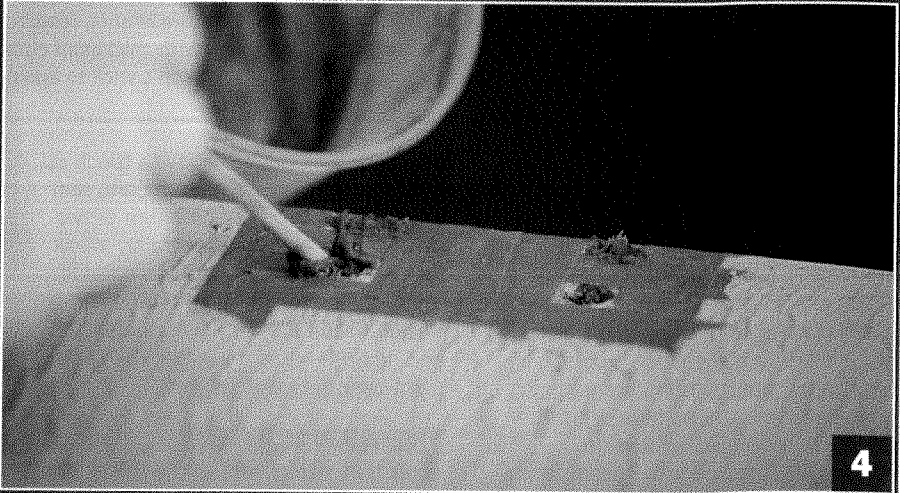
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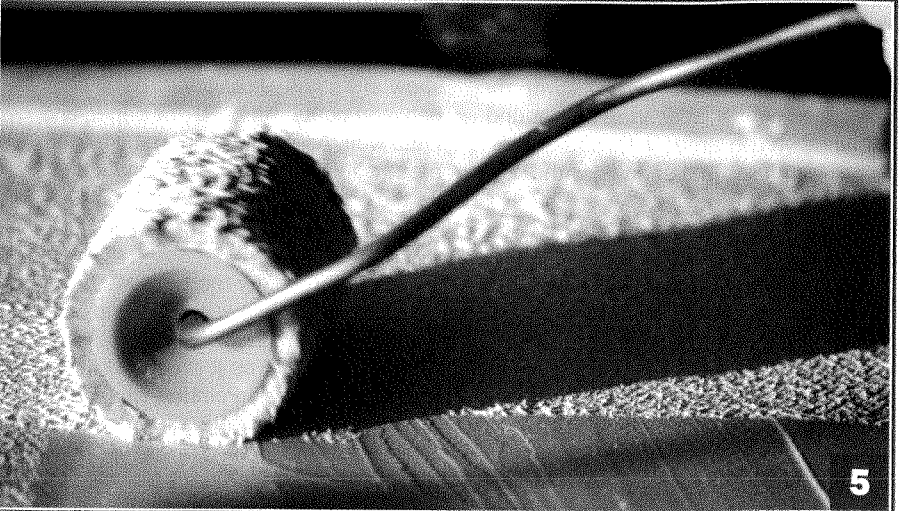
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- 1** A Dremel rotary tool is ideal for opening up spider cracks
- 2** Sand the repaired areas smooth with 80-grit paper
- 3** Use a sharp craft knife to trim back masking tape
- 4** Use a thickened epoxy mix for filling holes
- 5** A short-nap roller gives the anti-skid a stippled finish

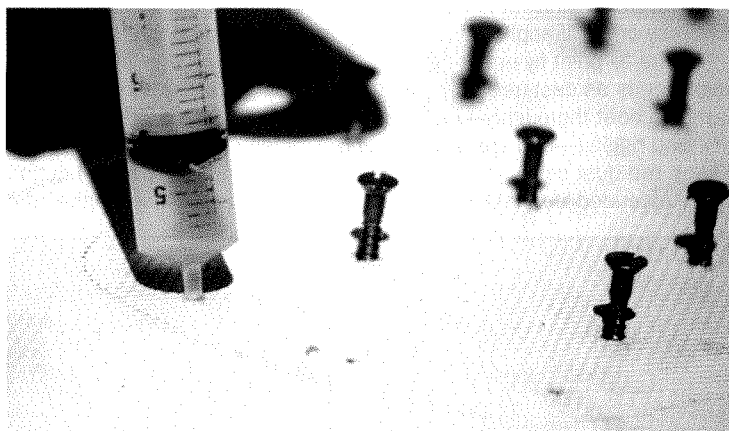
Delaminated-core repair

One way to repair a small area of dry delaminated core (less than 2 square feet) is to drill holes through the deck and inject the core with epoxy resin. Use a $\frac{1}{8}$ " drill and place the holes about 3" apart throughout the delaminated area. Drill only through the top laminate of the deck into the core; use a drill stop on the bit to keep from drilling through the inner skin.

You'll need a helper for the next step. Have ready a supply of #10 flat-head screws and a syringe for injecting the epoxy. Fill the syringe with epoxy through the large end with the plunger removed.

Start from the middle of the delaminated area.

Push the syringe firmly into the hole and inject epoxy until it comes out of an adjacent hole. Have your helper plug that hole with a screw with the threads coated with paraffin wax to make removal easier later. Continue injecting epoxy until no more epoxy flows from adjacent holes and you have filled that void. When you feel back pressure on the syringe, remove it and have your helper plug the injection hole with a screw. The epoxy will bubble up from this hole, so your helper must be quick. Move on to other holes and repeat the process. You'll have drilled some holes into solid core with no voids or delamination;



these won't accept any epoxy. When all the holes have been filled and plugged with screws, wipe up the excess epoxy with an acetone-soaked rag.

A warning: It's possible to inject too much epoxy, which will distort the surface of the deck. Stop injecting epoxy if you hear the deck creaking or see any distortion. If you have overdone it, remove a few screws to relieve the pressure. When the epoxy has cured to a rubbery consistency, remove the screws and fill the remaining holes with thickened epoxy. Polyester- and vinylester-based fillers won't stick to epoxy.

smooth the paint with light, even strokes. Stroke perpendicular to the direction that the paint was rolled on (if the roller is going up and down, the tipper goes from side to side). The tipper should brush back from the newly rolled surface to the tipped-off area. Do not overbrush the paint. Most brush strokes or imperfections are easy to sand out when the paint is dry, but badly painted areas should be completely stripped with solvent and redone.

When the primer is dry, sand the smooth parts of the deck with 120-grit paper. Fill any remaining cracks with the fairing compound. When the compound is dry, fair in the areas with 150-grit paper, and do a final sanding with 220-grit.

Anti-skid areas can be painted just like the smooth areas of the deck, but since the final surface will be rough, it's not as necessary to have a helper rolling and tipping the rolled on paint.

WHAT TO USE

One-part polyurethane paints, like Interlux's Brightside, are easy to work with and are fairly economical. They are not as hard-wearing as two-part

polyurethanes but are easy to touch up. Both types are nearly translucent, and you'll need to apply a minimum of two coats. If you use two-part paint, follow the manufacturer's directions carefully when adding reducer and thinner.

Don't tape the deck where anti-skid and smooth areas meet because you'll paint over the overlap later.

THE APPLICATION

Apply thin, even coats and alternate the direction for rolling and tipping with each coat. Add small amounts of thinner as soon as the brush begins to show any signs of dragging. Sand lightly between coats with 220-grit paper, and rinse well. Apply an additional coat to areas subject to heavy foot traffic such as the coamings.

WHEN TO PAINT

Try to paint on a dry morning when the temperature is between 60°F and 80°F. Painting late in the day can flatten the gloss in the paint as it reacts with moisture in the air. Painting when it's too hot or cold can affect the drying time and, more important, prevent the paint from flowing properly so that brush strokes disappear. We found that

covering the deck with a tarp the night before we wanted to paint keeps the dew off and allows us to get right back to the job in the morning.

When the smooth areas have hardened, tape the anti-skid areas, as shown in the photos. Press the tape firmly so the paint can't leak under the edges.

Add a flattening agent to the final coat of paint to diminish the gloss on anti-skid areas. There are two ways to add anti-skid particles to your paint: either mix them into the paint or shake them onto wet paint. We combined both methods, rolling first and then shaking extra particles onto heavily trafficked areas. Stir the paint often to keep the particles evenly mixed. Applying a final coat without anti-skid particles will keep the particles embedded.

LET IT BE

Paint can take several days to cure and reach maximum abrasion resistance, so take care during this time and don't reinstall hardware too early. Remember to save leftover paint for touching up later. Mixed two-part polyurethanes won't keep; allow them to harden in the can before discarding. ■