Wood construction in boats.

The debate has been raging for years now on boating forums at boat shows and especially in marketing programs. Many new craft boast stickers and add programs shouting "100% wood free construction" And yet the top quality builders with the highest brand loyalty all use wood.

Is this a good thing? Well, like most debates "it depends".

From my experience there is no material more suited to boat building than wood. Man has yet to out engineer God. Strength to weight wood cannot be beat. The caveat is in how it used and maintained. Human error, or more precisely laziness is the root cause of nearly every wood rot issue I encounter in my practice. The unfortunate fact is that a builder will spend big money on the best designers and architects spend incredible amounts on tooling, molds and the finest materials. The whole process goes as planned and the boat is laminated and assembled. So far so good right? This is where it all goes bad. The lowest paid guy on the line installs a piece of hardware and doesn't take the extra 5 minutes to seal it correctly. A few years later the wood is moist, saturated or even rotten. Think about a $500,000 boat sustaining thousands of dollars in damage because of a timesavings that adds up to 83 cents in labor. That is exactly what happens. Sometimes it's not the fault of the builder. Bedding material doesn't last forever. Would you be surprised if I told you that re-bedding your deck hardware and rubrail should be done around every 4-6 years? Also mechanics, riggers and do it yourselfers are prone to making the same basic mistakes when installing components.

Generally the areas of concern are stringers, transoms and foredeck hardware. At survey I will in almost all cases discover elevated core moisture or deterioration adjoining the anchor windlass, strike plate and rollers. Other common culprits are fairleads, haws fittings hatches and railing stanchions. The common thread of these intrusion prone fittings is that they are all regularly stressed or flexed causing the fasteners to loosen and the sealant to fail. The owners are usually just as surprised as the buyers when the news of a wet foredeck is presented.

Transom failures are actually caused more often by a poorly sealed trim piece covering the top than from the boltholes and transducers. Limber holes should be sealed with epoxy; gel coat is commonly used and will eventually fail.

Suggestions: Pick bedding materials carefully, a good sealant is preferred over adhesive properties. Over drill boltholes by one size to allow for sealant to coat the shoulder. Counter sink all screw holes and re-bed all deck hardware twice a decade. Your local full service marina, fiberglass shop or surveyor can be retained to evaluate your boats structure on an hourly basis.

PLEASE USE THIS TAG LINE

Don’t let gas prices keep you high and dry. There is plenty of inshore and near shore fun to be had. Dust off those old water skis, picnic baskets and light tackle and go boating.

You may email Capt. Campbell with questions, comments and ideas for topics you would like to see him address at: Baitkiller@comcast.net or 239-389-9769
Capt. John Campbell AMS is an Accredited Marine Surveyor associated with the Society of Accredited Marine Surveyors, The American Boat and Yacht Council and the Collier County Marine Trades organization.
Capt. Campbell is available to all local groups and civic organizations for speaking engagements on a wide variety of marine related topics.

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