

Maintenance Repairs and Upkeep

Every boat has mechanical equipment. We designed and equipped our boat with reliable mechanical equipment. There is plenty of it and it all must be constantly maintained and occasionally replaced or repaired. It is a full-time occupation.

There is frustration and stress when equipment fails. We worry like a parent over a sick child when something on the boat is broken. We try to be self-sufficient and have the ability to service everything aboard the boat and often this is a learning experience that occupies a lot of our time.

Finding people who know how to service and repair equipment while traveling to new and unfamiliar places is a frustrating challenge that usually ends with us giving up and doing the work ourselves. We have learned that many boat service people really have no idea what they are doing, or worse, often do not care as you sail off into the sunset. Even if we find someone competent, getting them to show up is often impossible. Local service providers are often busy servicing their regular customer base or, as in the case of South Florida, occupied with the professionally crewed mega yachts urgently getting ready for a charter season.

We maintain and repair almost everything ourselves. This works out for the best for several reasons. We don't have time to find and wait for someone else, we learn how to fix stuff that may one day fail far away from service providers and most importantly, we know the job will be done right. We do not trust others to work on our boat and too often we have been required to redo the work anyway. At times our lives depend on the boat and its equipment, so we have to know that everything is working. The exceptions to this rule include the size of the job, special tools needed, and some jobs that are just not fun to do. Some jobs take so many hours that they must be done by many workers together at shipyard. Some large heavy tools or specialty tools such as welding are just not practical to carry aboard the boat, so we have to rely on others. Some jobs such as underwater bottom cleaning in cold dirty marinas and bottom painting are not fun so we happily pay others to do that work.

Keeping up a spare parts inventory is a full-time project. We carry at least one spare of almost everything aboard the boat. When we pull something out of inventory it must be replaced. If it were not for Amazon and other online resources this would be a whole lot harder. Most of our equipment is not available at local hardware stores.

Globalization of goods and services causes endless frustrations trying to find parts and supplies for equipment made in foreign countries. Information provided in many equipment services manuals is sketchy. We think some equipment manufacturers do this on purpose expecting that you will take their equipment to one of their service dealers which is, of course, not possible when cruising to faraway places. Service manuals often specify parts only available in foreign countries. We have a growing inventory of metric and imperial nuts, bolts, and tools.

My advice to anyone thinking about living on a boat; if you can't fix things yourself and think you can ask someone else to do it, you are asking for trouble. We have seen many times this to be the cause of people selling a boat.

How much does it cost to maintain a boat? Sterling Hayden put it best when he said, "To be truly challenging, a voyage, like a life, must rest on a firm foundation of financial unrest." In our case, the simple answer is "more than we can afford." We mitigate the cost by doing as much work on the boat as we can ourselves and spending half of the year not in a leased slip. We anchor almost all the time.