London Boat Show news & preview

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- Sterndrive antifoul
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One of the test tubes being inspected for mid-season fouling

Sterndrive antidote

We conducted a season-long trial on seven different sterndrive antifouls to see which fared best

REPORT BY MARK TURLEY

Sterndrive legs are made of aluminium and while this metal is light and strong it is also well down the galvanic table, making it susceptible to corrosion when a nobler metal is in the vicinity and surrounded by seawater. Conventional wisdom therefore dictates that slapping a copper-laden paint on sterndrive legs – copper, or cuprous oxide, being the main active ingredient in the majority of hull antifouls – isn't a good idea, because copper is one those noble metals and likely to set up a destructive galvanic cell that will eat away at the aluminium.

Paint manufacturers, therefore, have to avoid copper when it comes to concocting an antifoul for sterndrive use. Zinc often gets a look-in plus a number of chemical biocide agents, while the non-stick properties of Teflon find a place too. The upshot is that coatings destined for sterndrives (or aluminium hulls) tend to be a less virulent toxic mix than those suitable for GRP hulls, making them susceptible to heavier fouling. We put seven leading sterndrive antifouls through a season-long test to see what level of protection they gave.

Test-tube trials

We tested seven different products, some familiar to us, others not, but the one name noticeable by its absence was Volvo's own brand of antifoul. Several months prior to our trial period that started last spring Volvo had withdrawn its own aerosol product, and when we checked just before going to press this was still the case.

It was nigh on impossible to squeeze all seven products onto one sterndrive leg for comparison, so we applied decent width bands of each product to some large diameter pipes and strung them up just below water level at two South Coast locations. However, simply keeping them static for five months does not replicate the usual use of a boat so on several occasions they were taken for a spin. The water pressure during this seatrial exercise invariably allowed the antifouls to shed some degree of fouling in much the same way as if the paints were on a sterndrive leg. For comparison, we also kept a section of pipe devoid of any antifouling.

Turn the page to find out how each product fared.

Six drive-time tips

- Most hull antifouls are copper oxide-based and to save any danger of this reacting with the aluminium sterndrive avoid applying it right up to the transom shield; a 3cm gap is all that is required.
- Apply plenty of antifouling and follow the manufacturer's instructions with regards application and quantity to use. Usually an aerosol is sufficient for one drive and it is important to use it up to get the right level of protection.
- Ensure the surfaces are dry and free from oil and grease or the paint won't adhere.
- Any scratches or areas where the drives original paint finish has been eroded should be touched in with an aluminium or epoxy primer.
- Avoid coating the sacrificial anodes. If using an aerosol-applied paint protect the anodes with masking tape.
- Stainless steel props are best left uncoated; in fact it's hard to make paint stick without suitable preparation. Aluminium props will benefit.

To emulate real boating the tubes were taken for an occasional spin

Sea-Jet Triple Pack

This pack gives you a two-part epoxy that has to be mixed and applied prior to painting on a couple of coats of SeaJet's useful 034 antifoul. Getting the epoxy coating on in ideal conditions is important as it has the advantage of sealing and protecting the leg. This makes the Triple Pack good value if you need a primer as well as an antifoul. It worked well on test with only a light slime covering the surface.

Contact:
Marine & Industrial
Tel: 01692 406822
www.seajetpaint.com

500ml
£22

MBM rating ✓✓✓✓✓

Hempel Mille Drive

This used to be a Blakes product before it came under the Hempel banner. The aerosol is easy to apply but it really needs a boat that is used frequently. If not, it is prone to a heavy build up of slime, which then provides a footing for a whispy weed that does not readily come away.

Contact: Hempel UK Ltd
Tel: 01633 833600
www.hempel.co.uk

500ml can
£20

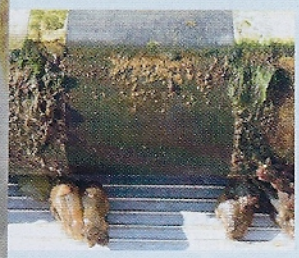
MBM rating ✓✓✓✓✓

Premier

This was one of the products we were unfamiliar with but during these trials it worked well. Although you have to fiddle about with a paint brush to apply it, it went on nice and thick. Most of the fouling amounted to just a light slime and because it comes in a 500ml tin you could probably squeeze two drives out of one pot. This makes it good value, although you will have to budget for postage and packaging if you don't have a local supplier.

Contact:
Premier Paints
Tel: 01844 220016
www.premiermarinepaints.com

500ml tin
£15



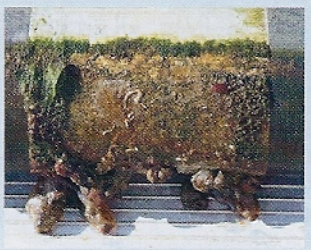
MBM rating ✓✓✓✓✓

TK Antifoul

This is available as a coloured antifoul or (as used here) a clear version, making it an ideal choice if your sterndrives are shiny and new. Being a spray it is easy to apply and it worked well with plenty of use, but it started to struggled when left stationary for extended periods of time. The amount of slime began to build up and wire worm started to form.

Contact: Silpar TK
Tel: +39 011 779 1177
www.silpartkline.com

500ml can
£22



MBM rating ✓✓✓✓✓

Hempel AluXtra

A self-polishing/eroding antifoul that has to be applied by brush after priming the substrate, so it is quite work intensive. The upshot is that it gave a consistently good result with just a light build up of slime, even after standing around idle.

Contact: Hempel UK Ltd

Tel: 01633 833600

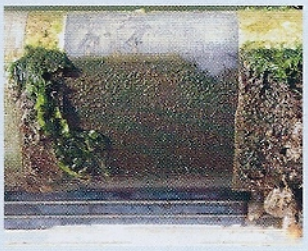
www.hempel.co.uk

375ml tin £20

MBM rating ✓✓✓✓✓

International Trilux 33

This paintbrush-applied product requires at least a couple of coats for preference, as it tends to go on quite thin. The upside is that we found little more than a medium build up of slime and a few wisps of weed, even when the tubes had been left stationary for over a month. After a quick spin most of the weed disappeared.



Contact: International Paint

Tel: 01489 775050

www.yachtpaint.com

375ml tin £23.50

MBM rating ✓✓✓✓✓

International Prop-O-Drev

This is a Teflon-based product that relies on its low-tack smoothness rather than biocides. It is easy to apply and easy to build up the coats. On initial examination the test strips showed a medium dose of slime and some weed but after a spin the Teflon seemed to work its magic and they self-cleaned to a useful degree.

Contact: International Paint

Tel: 01489 775050

www.yachtpaint.com

500ml can £29

MBM rating ✓✓✓✓✓

Conclusion

Looking at what boaters are saying on our forum, there are many cases where people were not happy about how their sterndrive antifoul was performing. Our season-long trial, however, gave a pretty positive set of results even though the test tubes didn't get as much use as the average boat would and benefitted less from the passing stream of water that tends to dislodge fouling and expose fresh biocide.

On talking to the various manufacturers, they suggest that most antifouling systems under perform because not enough paint has been applied. Aerosol products are particularly susceptible because, while it is easy to give them a spray and get the leg looking good, the paint thickness is often too thin and three, four or even five coats are needed. Similarly, if antifouling with a brush, take the time to apply a second coat.

Control panel

The section of pipe devoid of any antifouling – the control panel – endured a consistent heavy slime that was eagerly colonised by plenty of marine life, some of which disappeared during our sorties out, but much of the drag-inducing weed tended to be more tenacious and harder to dislodge.