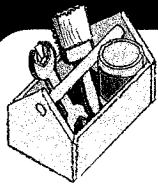


Make Sailing Easy!



You Can Do It PROJECT

Servicing Your Winches

Keep your winches in top shape without denting your wallet by servicing them yourself. Regular maintenance prolongs the life of these expensive machines and keeps them functioning properly. Although they may look just fine on the outside, poor maintenance results in friction and inefficiency and allows corrosion to set in. Dirt and metal grind down surfaces every time the winch is used. Your boat's winches should be serviced at least once a season, once or twice during the sailing season depending on the frequency and extent of your sailing endeavors, and again in the fall when the boat is hauled. Here are some tips to perform a complete overhaul so you have smooth running winches season after season.

Preparation

Winches are different from manufacturer to manufacturer. Their designs also differ depending on how many speeds they have, so having your winch service manual handy is important. If you don't have a service manual, most manufacturers offer a .pdf version that's easily obtainable online. Some older winches may need extra tools such as pliers, allen wrenches or an adjustable wrench.

The tools you'll most likely need

- Thin nitrile or rubber gloves • Screwdriver • Cleaning solvent • Soft cloth • Cardboard box or parts tray (a shallow soda-can box from the local grocery store works) • Winch grease • Oil • Brush • Circlip pliers • Service kit containing pawls, circlips and pawl springs • Exploded view diagram from manufacturer's website

Replacement parts in the form of a service kit are necessary when embarking on a winch-cleaning binge and should be purchased before starting the job. Anybody that's ever serviced a winch has seen pawls fly by and springs sprung towards the deep. A helpful tip that will make losing parts less frequent is to set your parts down in a box only and never on the boat. One idea for preventing pawls and springs from flinging to a watery demise is to cut a hole the diameter of the winch drum in the center of the parts box. Slip this over the winch before you begin working on it and secure with masking tape.

A tip that will reduce confusion when assembling the winch back together involves putting your parts down in the order in which you disassembled them, then cleaning them in that order. This makes reassembly quick and easy. You may also prefer the digital camera method. Taking pictures to record where all the pieces fit as you take it apart will also aid in reassembly.

Disassembly, Cleaning & Inspection

Steps for disassembling your winch will be different for each make and model. There will be more parts to dismantle if you have multiple speeds or a self-tailer. Refer to the manufacturer's service manual for details that pertain to your model winch. The following account may help guide you through dismantling basic winches.

The first step is to remove the drum. On Lewmar models, use a screwdriver to pry off the circlip or retainer ring at the top of the drum that surrounds the winch handle socket. On Harken winches, unscrew the top screw found in the winch handle socket. Remove the top plate and lift off the drum. If you have a self-tailing winch, you'll need to remove the feeder arm and/or self-tailing jaws before you can remove the drum.

Remove and clean drum bearings and washer, then remove the spindle retaining collets, or "keys", and lift out the main spindle. If you have a two-speed winch you might need to use a small screwdriver to lift out the gear spindle and remove the gears. This is where it is important to place your parts in the box or on a sheet of paper (still in the box) in the order you removed them. When you clean each piece, set it down in its spot on the paper. That way, the parts are always in order for quick reassembly. To clean winch parts, use a solvent and a lint free cloth to remove existing grease.

Remove, clean and inspect pawls and springs. While inspecting pawls and pawl springs, look for any signs of wear, pitting or distortion and replace them if there are. Also check bearings, gears and spindles for wear and corrosion. Inspect the winch base. Look for rot in winch pads and cracks around bolt holes.

Remember to dry your parts thoroughly before applying any oil or winch grease. If there is any leftover solvent, it can promote the breakdown of your newly applied oil.

Lubrication

Once everything is completely dry and all leftover solvent is wiped away, lubricate pawls with light oil. Use a brush to spread a light even coat of grease over spindles, gears and bearings with winch grease. Take care to lightly grease all gear teeth and bearing surfaces. Keep in mind that too much grease can cause salt and water deposits to become trapped in the winch.

Reassembly

Now that everything has been dismantled, cleaned, inspected and re-lubricated, it is time to put back what you've undone. If you were careful to place your parts in a successive order - or if you were diligent with the digital camera, you will have your winch back together and working in no time.

When all your winches have been serviced, you are ready to enjoy sailing again! Don't forget about them until next year, however. In order to keep your winches happy, flush them frequently with fresh water, especially after each outing. Washing the winch drum prevents dirt and grit from grinding in when sheets are wrapped around it. Cover the winches when not in use. If you make it a habit to protect your winches, they'll remain a pleasure to use for years and you'll stave off expensive and badly timed breakdowns.