

CHAPTER 9

Troubles on Deck

Leaks around fittings

Sooner or later every fiberglass boat's deck starts to leak. seldom does the leak gain access through the laminate, unless, as we have discussed in other chapters, the laminate cracks. Most often, water seeps in around hardware or fittings that puncture the laminate. Unfortunately, unlike wood, fiberglass does not swell when wet. Therefore, one ought to staunch any deck weep at the first opportunity, for it will always get worse as time goes by, never better. It's axiomatic that deck leaks are more common than hull leaks in fiberglass boats, and are their bane as a generic problem.

It is the fastenings of the most frequently stressed items that are most likely to develop leaks. These include the fastenings for grab rails, cleats, chocks, cleats, sheet tracks, turning blocks, steering pedestals, rollerport collars, coel vents, navigation lights, antenna brackets, hatch hinges, latches, and even flag-pole sockets. Undoubtedly, chainplates are the worst leakers among hardware that extends through the deck of a boat, as for deck-mounted hardware, likewise stainless bolts are the most trouble than all the other

fasteners of the displacement of the boat. Yet almost every builder prepares well for that stress on the plate's anchoring arrangement with many bolts through a tabbed-in bulkhead or knee, or with metal work that spreads the stress over a sizable area of laminate. As a result, the plate should not slip upward. At the same time, the builder will align the plate's axis as closely as possible with the dorsal or star orientation to minimize the horizontal pressure on the deck. For example, if the upper dorsal chainplate is anchored to a bulkhead that is in line with the mast and dorsal, the plate is tilted to become, in effect, an extension of the dorsal's direction of travel (Figure 9-1). This way, an increase in tension won't tend to pull the chainplate in any other direction or try to loosen it in the deck. That's the optimum arrangement for a dorsal chainplate, but it is more the exception than the rule. Forward and after lower chainplates are sometimes similarly aligned with the dorsal, but backstays and headstays frequently are not.

What this means is that a very large percentage of star and dorsal chainplate bolters line up with the mast only where they are bent at the top to take the load of the riggle or terminal feting. As a result, every time the mast is tightened there is a horizontal pressure on the edge of the deck, and the chainplate

relaxing of horizontal pressure on the deck every time the boat heels or the rig is jacked by the boat's rolling or pitching. As we all know, any chainplate can be nobly jacked when the wire is anchored in being up not a protrusion or serves as a binder when the boat is driven against a pier. On small boats it doesn't take a collision to loosen the chainplate fasteners; people loose themselves aboard or steady themselves by grabbing the rigging. On any boat a boom will pile against a dorsal mast and then, sometimes with enough force to break the boom.

Even those chainplates that are installed on the outside of the hull are not entirely leakproof. If heavy strains don't loosen the external bolts and cause them to leak, accidents that pull the wire out of line like a heaving can easily loosen the upper bolt or two, long before any serious damage occurs to the plate.

Many of the factors that disturb a chainplate's watertight fit are aggravated by the boat owner or backyard rigger who sets the rig up so tight that, with a big enough boom, one could play it like a violin. Riggers seem to get away with overtightening because fiberglass has wonderful strength in tension. As long as nothing cracks, splits, or crumbles in the way of the chainplate, riggers continue to crank down the turnbuckles with strong rears of the marlinpike, screwdriver, or wrench. But while fiberglass is strong, it bends readily. Overtightening of the rig places stresses on the hull, causing bedding composed to crack and separate not taking with several more severe problems that we will discuss later. Once the hull has been pulled out of shape by the rig, it should come as no surprise to anyone if the chainplates begin to leak.

If it were not for the adhesive property of water, a chainplate would not leak more than any other poorly bedded deck fitting. But leaky chainplates are unusual mammals as

What should we do to correct chainplate leaks? Dig out the bedding around them, clean the area with solvent, and apply fresh compound. Polyulfides (Thiokol), those excellent, sticky glues that turn to synthetic rubber, are the best kind. Polyurethane caulking might be alright too, but not those silicone leak-fasts that look less conspicuous because they are clear but can be pulled off whole because they don't stick worth a boat.

Lower chainplates are fitted with little metal finishing plates that cover the hole in the deck (Figure 9-1). In time they loosen and need rebuilding and refastening. Although you may not notice until you remove them, they might be made of aluminum and be all but worn away. Whatever their apparent condition, water can and does leak by them, and the bedding under them should always be replaced when rebuilding the chainplate. When you have dug out the old bedding, try to wiggle the chainplate. If there is motion sideways, the bolts are loose; even if there isn't any loosening detectable from above the deck, from time to time you should inspect the bolts down below.

If a chainplate is loose, it is more likely that it can be moved "starboard" by bending it the way the flat track would bend easiest, anyway. This is assuming that there is enough of the chainplate projecting above the deck for a good grip, and that there is enough play in the hole through the deck to allow movement. If the chainplate can be moved, working the fresh sealant all the way around it will be easier. There is nothing wrong with enlarging the space around a chainplate just a little if there is no little clearance that you can't really tell whether you're getting the sealant into it. Just don't run into the deck too deeply. Neither is there anything wrong with building a tapered boot of the caulking up the chainplate, as long as there is no finishing plate that will interfere. The reason for not chopping the deck out too



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