

## Prevent Outboard Breakdowns with Simple Maintenance



Keeping your outboard in tip-top shape can be done even if you're not a mechanic. There is nothing worse than trying to run to shore to flee an incoming storm and hearing that all-too-familiar cough and sputter from the outboard. More often than not, just a little TLC and preventive maintenance could have prevented the fact that you are now bobbing around like a cork, pounded by waves and soaked by the torrential downpour.

If you are not a mechanic, get a reliable one and start every season with a professional tune-up. You should have the mechanic test the spark, run a compression test, pressure test the lower unit, check the seals and water pump, test the warning alarms and, in general, go over the motor in such a manner as to eliminate most causes of breakdown. After you have had your annual check-up there are many things that you can do to help assure that you make it through the season without being towed home.

After every outing, flush out the engine. This doesn't just apply to salt water outings but to fresh water as well. If the lake or river you operate on isn't as clear as the water from your garden hose you need to flush. If you ran aground and kicked up some sand, you need to flush. It won't take long, ten to fifteen minutes, and during that time you can check out some other items.

To flush the engine you will need a set of "rabbit ears" (two flexible rubber seals connected with a metal clamp). Simply slip this apparatus onto the lower unit where the water is picked up and attach a garden hose. Start up the engine and let the water pump do the rest. (Be sure to stay clear of the prop and make sure no one tries to shift into gear)

While the motor is being flushed, check the water pump to make sure you have good water flow. Carefully put your finger through the stream of water. It may be warm, but it shouldn't be hot. If the output is not strong, you may have some debris stuck in the outflow tube. You should immediately shut down the engine to prevent overheating and damage. A small piece of wire or similar object can be inserted up into the flow tube and worked back and forth. Start the engine again and check the output. If that doesn't solve the problem you may need a new water pump.

After flushing the engine, you should disconnect the fuel line and allow the engine to burn all the fuel in the carburetor. By the way, make sure you always use fresh fuel. You should not use fuel that has been sitting around for over 60 days. That means; at the end of your season take the fuel in your tanks to the

proper recycling authority. Don't save it up for next year. That's an invitation for disaster. Other fuel related items you should check are:

- Check the fuel line for cracks and worn spots
- Make sure the fuel primer bulb is not cracked and is pliable
- Make sure the fuel line fittings seat properly and don't leak
- Check the clamps on the fuel line for rust or corrosion
- Check the fuel tanks for damage and corrosion
- Check the tank vent to make sure it aspirates properly (many a mechanic has handed a boater a bill for services after he simply opened the tank vent)
- Check for water in the fuel

Once you have finished the flushing and run the engine out of fuel, be sure to turn off the key and, if you have a battery switch, turn it off. Open up the engine cover and check for fuel or water leaks. If you find leaks you should consult your mechanic. Be sure to wipe everything down and spray with a anti-corrosive like WD 40 or Quick-lube. Be sure to lubricate all the moving parts such as the shift and throttle cables, carburetor valves etc. Check your owner's manual for details.

Once you have performed your post-trip preventative maintenance program, replace the engine cover and wipe the outside down. If you have a canvas or plastic cover for the engine you should keep it in place between trips.

Hope this helps and decreases your chance of engine failure in the future.

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