

Bringing back the SHINE

By Capt. Louis Van Bergen

Man vs. Machine

As you walk down the aisles at the boat show, you see boats that have an absolutely brilliant shine on their hulls. You remember back when you first got your boat with its impeccable hull. What has happened since then to make your hull take on a dull and faded appearance? UV radiation from the sun and everything else your hull gets bombarded with, have taken their toll.

The condition you may most often observe is called oxidation. Oxidation is the chalky or cloudy areas on the hull. What has happened is the gel coat, the thin outer layer of the hull, has been damaged. Whether your boat is only a few years old or has been around for decades, the following materials and processes can help you make that hull look like it just popped out of the mold at the factory.

Products

On the shelves in your local marine supply store you will find many different products claiming to be what you need. It can be quite confusing when you start to read all the claims and labels. All the major brands have a line of products to use for our project including 3M, Meguiar's and Starbrite.

There are one step products that incorporate a cleaner/restorer with wax. This eliminates multiple steps and time. There are also finishing products that remove minor scratches and light oxidation. If the hull is in really poor shape, a heavy duty rubbing compound will be necessary. In the last few years a fourth category has emerged, copolymer coatings. I have not used them but like the results I have seen from friends and demonstrations at the boat shows. We will deal with the tried and true compounds in this article.



Not only will you need a compounding product but fiberglass soap, cleaner, dewaxer and gloves to protect yourself.

All these products will be applied to the hull by moderately rubbing the product over the hull until a shine is restored. Doing an entire boat by hand will take many hours and a considerable amount of energy.

I have done this in the past but now rely upon an electric circular polisher. These are not the ones designed for buffing the wax on your car, as they do not have the power to get the job done. Makita, Porter Cable and Dewalt all make models with variable speed control, which is essential. A typical grinder has too high an rpm for working on fiberglass as it can burn the gel coat.

A random orbital polisher will help reduce the tendency for swirl marks. These machines are expensive but well worth the money. If you don't have the money to buy one or a friend with one, spend \$20 at a local tool rental store and put it on your birthday list.



The polisher on the bottom has the power to compound a fiberglass hull; the top one will not get the job done.

Pads and Accessories

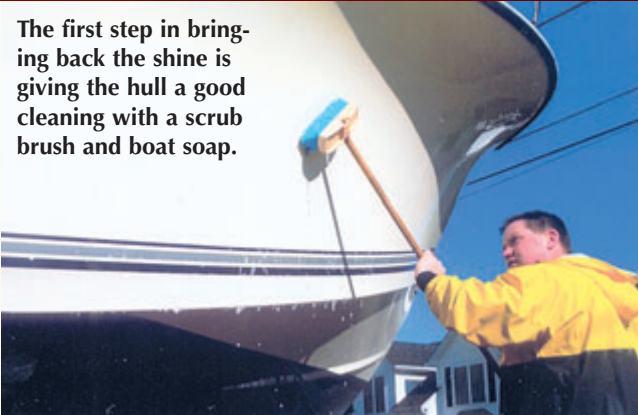
Even if you do not use a machine, you will need lots of towels, vinyl gloves and a foam applicator. If you go the machine route, you will need a wool compounding pad. I have two so I can continue working even when the pad gets caked with compound.

To help make changing the pads quicker, I have a velcro backing plate which the pads attach to. I also have a stainless wire brush and a specialized pad cleaner to make the pad work longer, but more on that later.

Preparation

Before you can begin compounding, the hull needs to be thoroughly cleaned. I use quality boat soap with a cup or two of bleach in a bucket of warm water. Using a scrub brush or sponge, start at the top and work your way toward the waterline. Be sure to completely rinse off any

The first step in bringing back the shine is giving the hull a good cleaning with a scrub brush and boat soap.



soap or residue. Any stains left behind can be removed with a concentrated hull cleaner. The last step is to remove any wax from the hull. This is important for the compounding product to work correctly. Use gloves, as the fiberglass dewaxer can cause irritations.

Apply the dewaxer to a clean towel and wipe the hull in one direction to insure you are removing the wax. Also, change the towel frequently to ensure you are not simply spreading the wax. Place all used towels in an area where no one can confuse them with clean ones for other jobs.

Compounding

If compounding by hand, you will need to apply the product to a soft cloth and rub on the surface with a firm circular motion. Once the compound is dry, remove the residue with a towel. Repeat until you are satisfied with the results. It is best to work in small areas to ensure complete coverage. After completing the entire hull, apply a coat of wax, basically repeating the above steps with wax. If you have friends that enjoy hard work with great results at the end of the day, invite them to help. If you are like me and love to do it all yourself, then you had better read on.

Using the polisher can be intimidating, but as you gain experience and confidence, you will shine. Again, work only in a small area (maybe 2 by 2 feet). Apply a sufficient amount of compound with an applicator pad to the hull so the compound remains wet. I also apply some

compound directly to the compounding pad and then spread it over the area to be worked.

I place the pad on the hull at approximately a 45-degree angle. Some people say to place the pad flat on the surface, but I found it has a tendency to jump around a bit too much.

Once you start the machine, continuously move the pad to avoid the chance of "burning" the gel coat. I use a simple back and forth motion followed by an up and down motion to ensure complete coverage. Others will tell you a figure 8 pattern is best. Do what YOU feel comfortable with. Use caution around corners, hardware and graphics, as they can be damaged or damage the machine. As the compound dries, remove the residue with a clean towel.

After working for a while, the pad starts to get clogged. This is when the stainless wire brush comes into play. Simply turn the machine upside down and turn it on while using the brush to spur or remove caked compound from the pad.

After spurring the pad many times, a more complete cleaning may be necessary. I found a product specifically designed for cleaning these pads online, Snappy Pad Cleaner. Just toss the cleaning powder, dirty pad and water in a bucket for a half hour. When done, rinse the cleaned pad and let it dry in the sun.

Wax ON, Wax OFF

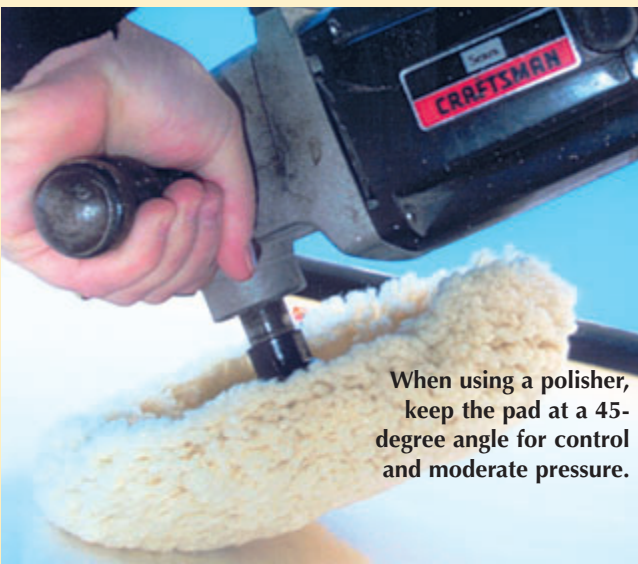
If the one step cleaner wax was not used, you have one final step to complete your hull's revitalization. Applying a good quality wax will protect the results of your hard work from sunlight, salt spray and grime. Collinite's paste wax is by far the best wax I have used. When we haul the boat in December, it is still beading water. The wax should be applied with an applicator designated for use with only wax. Apply it in a circular motion in a small area as was done for the compounding. Once it dries to a haze, remove it with a clean towel. After completing the entire boat, I repeat the process again to hit any spots I may have missed. The final step is a QUICK polishing with the polisher and a polishing pad.

Storage

Most of the compounds list protection against freezing, so store them in a spot inside the house rather than in the garage. The pads, once cleaned and dry, are placed in labeled Ziploc bags until the next use.

Following the steps in this article may not get you a new boat but they will get your boat looking like it is new again. If you decide you are not comfortable attempting this project, just take a look in the magazine for a boat detailer in your area. The results are the same, but the path is easier (I won't lie).

There is no better compliment than another boater commenting on how nice your boat looks. Nothing feels better than knowing, and even better, telling them you did it yourself.



When using a polisher, keep the pad at a 45-degree angle for control and moderate pressure.