

Boat maintenance makes for an endless summer

As boats and other watercraft are pulled out of storage and unraveled from their shrinkwrap cocoons, the happy boat owner becomes a common sight.

With a variety of spring and summer fun on the horizon, it can be a time of great anticipation. Another sight, however, is the unhappy boat owner, stalled and dried out because of boat malfunctions or damage.

Fortunately, there are many options for repair and service, so the boating season doesn't have to end prematurely.

Action Water Sports, under the management of Kevin Wright since the summer of 2003, has won numerous awards, including the "Best in Customer Service" award from the Better Business Bureau of western Michigan. Wright credits the focus he places on exceeding customer expectations.

As an authorized Mastercraft dealership, Action Water Sports offers boats in all sizes, including 21-28 foot family runabouts. As part of Mastercraft's "Maristar" line, the runabouts will be the focus of Action Water Sports' display at the Show and Sale. But Wright's commitment goes beyond the sale itself.

"We build relationships with customers, which means helping them long-term with their boat and water sports needs," Wright said. "We carry a lot of parts in stock, and our goal is to have very quick turnaround in all of our service. Our boating season is short enough as it is, without having your boat sitting for a week or two, waiting for parts."

Action Water Sports services boats with inboard, direct drive or V-drive motors, and offers a variety of services ranging from fiberglass, upholstery and canvas repair, to detailing and waxing. Professional winterization is also offered, along with ongoing service needs like oil changes and general maintenance.

Among the most common

mistakes for novice boaters, according to Wright, can be simple ones, such as forgetting to replace the drain plug before the boat goes in the water. Also, improper winter protection can cause problems with the drive train, affect lubrication and even ruin the engine. During operation, boats can overheat due to faulty impellers, which help cool the engine.

Damage from hitting objects in the water is also common, so common that a Lake Ann business specializes in repairing that damage. Everyone from the trolling fisherman to the family cruising up to the U.P. has a particular propeller for them, said Doug Beaudrie, owner of Perfect Wheel in Lake Ann.

Now celebrating its 25th year in business, Perfect Wheel specializes in propeller sale and repair. While today's bronze, nickel and mercury-alloy propellers are stronger and tolerate more abuse than the props of 40 years ago, Beaudrie said that several tactics can help you steer clear of trouble.

Careful monitoring of the immediate environment is crucial. River fishers are often surprised how quickly shallow areas and sandbars creep up. Submerged logs hide in Grand Traverse Bay. Sometimes, too, the aquatic creature called the Lookeyloo is to blame.

"Some guys have got to see how pretty the homes are — someone will say, "Get in a little closer," and next thing you know, they've run into the ground," he said.

The trial-and-error method of waterways education is familiar to Beaudrie, and provides part of his repeat business.

"I'll have guys come in and say, 'I just bought this boat and look what I did,'" he said.

Depthfinders can provide some measure of comfort, but Beaudrie says the sensors are commonly mounted at the back of the boat — too far away in many instances. More reliable are charts of local lakes, inexpensive and available from local bait and sup-

ply stores. Complete books covering multiple counties can be had for under ten dollars.

Basic rules should also be learned, says Beaudrie, since they ultimately can save a person money.

"A lot of people don't know how to pass someone," he said. "Books and courses reveal that right-hand boaters have the right of way. We have hundreds of accidents on our lakes because neither person knows what to do."

Beaudrie suggested the Power Squadron, a private national boating organization for help. Several educational courses are available each

year, and a one-day course is planned for May 21. Home study is also an option, through a computer course.

In the end, propellers can be fixed whether enthusiasm or accident is to blame. Repairs, often costing a third of the price of replacement, are available from Beaudrie, who looks forward to returning to the boat show after a few years away. As part of Perfect Wheel's 25th anniversary, Doug Beaudrie says he'll give a 25 percent discount off all merchandise and service.

More information on Power Squadron Boater Education courses: Dale Wentzloff at 882-7229 .



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