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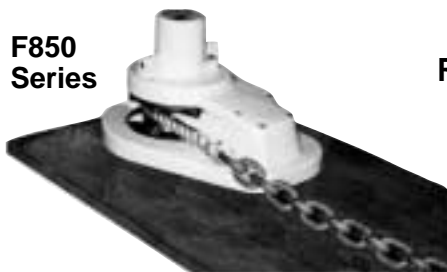
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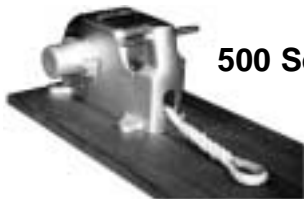


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**Boat
Q&A
Talk**

by Conrad & Judy Kreuter

Q: Dear Boat Talk:

I have been shopping for a boat. I see that there are many different materials used in the construction of boats. Can you discuss the advantages of each?

DS, Trumbull CT.

A: Dear DS:

In today's boat market the most common material used in the construction of boats is fiberglass. Fiberglass matting is the basic material which is infused with resins to make a strong yet lightweight structure. The matting is a woven fiberglass cloth which is used to build up layers of thickness depending on the section of the boat that is being built. This is normally referred to as hand-laid fiberglass construction. The fiberglass mats are saturated with resins, which when cured, bond the mats together and retain their shape.

The boat designer builds a mold which is the opposite of the finished product. The piece to be fabricated is built from the outside in. That is, the mold first gets a layer of gelcoat which is the shiny outer layer. The matting is laid in next while being infused with the resin to bind the structure together. It takes between 24 to 36 hours to cure. Some boat builders leave the part in the mold for a couple of days.

Once cured, the part is removed from the mold and turned right-side up. Additional parts of the boat are made in a similar fashion and then joined to form a completed boat.

In the high stress areas of the boat, additional strengthening may be needed. Traditionally, wood or balsa core has been used for this purpose. The wood is encapsulated in fiberglass. If done properly, this

method will last a considerable amount of time. The problem with wood is that it could become exposed to water, which could be caused by cracks in the gelcoat or the fiberglass, or by leakage around fittings. Once water saturates the wood, the water swells the wood, further cracking, or delaminating, the fiberglass. In some hulls the wet wood could add a few hundred to a thousand pounds to the overall boat weight.

Some boat builders are now using composite materials to eliminate the wood. The advantage of composites is that they will not retain water and gain weight, thereby keeping the overall structure intact for a much longer period of time.

Aluminum is another common boat building material usually found in smaller boats where weight is a factor. One method of construction is to rivet the aluminum panels together. In larger boats the aluminum seams may be welded. Aluminum can react with salt water if not properly protected. Special paints are required to bottom paint aluminum boats.

While there is no overall "best" material to use for the various components of a modern boat, the best way to determine the quality of the components of the boat you are considering is to compare the materials used with other boats in its class.

Address your questions to:

Moriches Boat & Motor

PO Box 658

East Moriches NY 11940

A free subscription to Long Island Boating World will be awarded for each question used.