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Boat Q&A Talk

Dear Boat Talk: I was always told for 40 years to store my boat with full fuel tanks for the winter to avoid condensation. My boat has a 300 gallon aluminum gas tank. What is the proper storage theory now with E-10 gasoline? W. S., Rocky Hill, CT.

Dear W. S. : Forty years ago the formula for gasoline was much different than the current formulation. In the past, gasoline contained tetraethyl lead to “cushion” the engine valve face from slamming down onto the valve seat. The EPA removed lead additives from motor fuel as a clean air measure.

The old gasoline formula produced less than half a barrel of gasoline from each barrel of oil. Back in the seventies, gasoline refiners started to experiment with the formula for gas, changing the components of the fuel to produce more useable gallons of gasoline from a barrel of oil. This is what we call reformulated gasoline and refiners have been doing this reformulation ever since.

Today’s gasoline has many characteristics that were not present in gasoline of the past. Because of the constant tinkering of the gasoline formula, today’s gasoline has a much shorter shelf life than fuels of the past. The octane rating has been found to start to deteriorate in as little as six weeks. This means that the 89 octane fuel you just pumped into the boat’s fuel tank could be something much less a few weeks into the season. This reduced shelf life usually does not impact your automobile since you go through a tank of gas in less than a week. Gasoline may sit in your boat’s fuel tank much longer, especially in the early part of the boating season because of the finicky weather.

In addition, ethyl alcohol or ethanol has been added to motor fuels in densely populated areas such as ours, to reduce air pollution. Ethanol is hydroscopic; that

is, it attracts moisture. This could be coming from air surrounding the fuel or it could be coming from water already mixed with the fuel in the boat’s tank. In either case the ethanol/water mix will drop to the bottom of the tank since it’s heavier than the gasoline.

If your tank was filled for winter storage at the end of the season with 300 hundred gallons of gas, you could have up to 30 gallons of ethanol/water mixture at the bottom of the tank come springtime. Water separating fuel filters cannot handle this volume of contaminates and this mixture will have to be removed from the fuel tank before start-up.

Our recommendation for winter storage is to leave the fuel tank as empty as possible and add a good quality gas stabilizer to the remaining gasoline. In the spring, only fill the tank with fresh gasoline that can be used within a couple of weeks. You may also want to add octane boosters to treat the fuel left in the tank from winter storage. Always make sure that you have water-separating fuel filters and that you check them for water regularly during the season.

Address your questions to:
Moriches Boat & Motor
PO Box 658
East Moriches, NY 11940

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

Editor’s Note: We repeat this column from an earlier issue due to the current interest in this topic.

