

by

Help Me Help You

FOR WEEKS ON END I'VE BEEN floating in the brine. My throat, skin, and lungs have been seared by exposure to salty water and air, and I itch all over.

Both inside and outside, my body cries for a freshwater bath. I daydream of cool, clean water pouring over my head and running down every crease in my skin. I would give anything—anything—to feel a crisp, cleansing torrent wash away the salt that cakes my body and clogs my pores.

I am your outboard engine.

I know it's within your power to give me what I so desperately need—the hose is right over there, I can see it through my tearing eye-bolts. Yet even though you know that leaving saltwater in my veins does irreparable damage, here I sit. By failing to give me a thorough freshwater flush after each and every use in saltwater you are slowly killing me.

I'm corroding from the inside out. The minerals left behind by evaporating saltwater restrict the flow in my cooling system. The neoprene vanes on my water pump impeller will be greeted with grit the next time I'm started up if you allow the water to dry and the salts to crystallize in my lower unit. So please, dear owner, give me a thorough freshwater flush for at least five minutes, after each and every time you run me in saltwater.

My skin needs attention, too. Care for the finish on my cowl, and it will stay bright and shiny for many years. Leave it caked in salt then sit back as the sun's rays beats down—and are magnified by those salt crystals—and my finish will look drab after just a few seasons.

Don't scoff; maintaining my good looks is a matter of smart economics, because my appearance will be a major factor when you go to sell me. Though it may be superficial, truth be told a great-looking cowl has just as much

impact as how beautiful I am on the inside when I'm trying to allure a prospective buyer.

Can you even remember the last time you lovingly rubbed and buffed my finish with a thick, protective paste wax? I can't either. I deserve that wax job every few months, not only because it keeps me looking good, but also because it protects my paint from UV damage. On top of that it makes it easier to clean me up at the end of the day, since a slick coating of wax fights off grime and scum lines trying to stick to my surface.



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So give me a little paste-wax loving in the spring and in the fall. Make me gleam with that reflective (though much less protective) spray wax every couple weeks. And after each and every visit to saltwater, spray me down and wipe me clean with a microfiber mitt and some soapy water. Five years from now, I'll still look like the gorgeous outboard you first fell for.

Why are you looking at my lower unit like that? Do you see some new nicks and dings in my propeller? Smooth them out with a file, please. If you don't, not only will my efficiency take a dip, the entire boat will be subjected to more vibrations. Every spring you should make sure my prop is looking good and if there's any damage that goes beyond minor nicks and dings, have it reconditioned.

Yes, I know you love me for what's inside even more than for what's outside. Remember that unlike a car engine and the easy life it enjoys on dry land, my crankshaft might spin

for hours on end upwards of 4,000 RPM. My oil breaks down much faster, and needs constant replacement. Same goes for my lower unit lube.

To keep me running strong, both must be replaced at the appropriate intervals. So help keep the inner me beautiful by paying attention to my hour meter, and changing my lower unit lube and crankcase oil as my manufacturer recommends.

After we've had so much fun together all year long and it's time to wrap me up for the winter, change all of my lubes one more time regardless of how many hours have passed since the last oil change. If any water has gotten in through a seal or formed from condensation, letting it sit in me all winter long is begging for corrosion to appear or—worse yet—freeze damage to occur.

I know it seems like I'm asking a lot, but if you're going to expose me to the pain of saltwater use for months on end there are some other steps you need to take for me, too. Many owners forget that my trim and steering systems have Zerk fittings that need to be greased at least once a year. My pivot bearing is another sensitive spot, and it needs to be rinsed off thoroughly after every trip or corrosion may set it.

Speaking of corrosion, there are a number of metal clips, fittings, and clamps under my cowl which will last a lot longer if, each spring, you give them a light spray with CorrosionX, Boeshield T9, or a similar corrosion-inhibitor. In fact, it's a good idea to soak a rag with some of this stuff and give my entire powerhead a wipe-down.

Ahhhh, thank you so much for that freshwater, and for all of this additional attention. Thanks to your help I'll be more reliable, which means more fun for you out on the water. Your maintenance costs will go down, and my resale value will go up. Best of all, I'll feel almost human once again.