



BY MICHAEL PETERS

# SIGHTLINES

## Maintenance Issues

OH, TO HECK WITH ONBOARD CHORES.



WESLEY ALLSBROOK

**S**pring has sprung and a lot of boating magazines have long since published their maintenance issues aimed at helping novices get their boats ready for summer. Well, I don't think readers of *Power & Motoryacht* are novices, so I'll assume most of you know this stuff. And if you are a bit like me, you didn't really need another maintenance issue anyway, primarily because you simply have an issue with maintenance itself. Personally, I hate it.

I am quite capable of dedicating one or two years to building a new boat for myself, just don't expect me to maintain it afterwards. As a landscape-architect professor once told me, "I am happy to plant a tree, just don't expect me to water it." I have adopted this philosophy fully and it has driven my wife nuts for years. I refer to myself as a creator not a maintainer, she just calls me lazy. Being a bit more analytical than her and looking for an excuse, I have worked it out statistically. In the 22 years that we have owned our *Bertram Villam* I estimate we have used it approximately 500 times, and I can only remember being towed home on maybe five occasions. So that is a 99-percent success rate. I figure that's pretty good, but boy do I catch hell for that one percent!

A few weeks ago my wife and I decided to take *Villam* out for Sunday lunch. The boat started a little hard, but no worries. As we idled out of the bayou, Chareese asks, "What's that squeaking sound?" Honestly, she is suspicious of everything and in defense of my stel-

lar record, I get annoyed at her question. I answer that it is just the belts because the boat has been sitting a while, nothing a little more rpm won't help. A minute later the cockpit fills with a burnt-rubber smell, so I lift the engine box and see that the engine has eaten the serpentine belt. Black rubber powder is everywhere. Apparently, more rpm has not helped. I managed to restart the engine, and crept home. No emergency calls were made and no one towed us in, so it was a successful trip in my book. A shrill squeaking sound started coming from my wife when we got home though.

Chareese was given fair warning before we married. The first time I met her brother, I had towed my old 20-foot *Bertram* down to Marathon for a boating weekend. Of course, Randy had heard all the hype about me being a yacht designer from his sister, but then witnessed me pump fuel down an old deck fill (that

So maybe, just maybe, you have a maintenance-related horror story of your very own? Share the dispiriting highlights with Michael at [inbox@pmymag.com](mailto:inbox@pmymag.com).

I had neglected to remove) straight into the bilge compartment. I pumped the bilge as dry as I could, closed the engine hatch, and turned the blower on to clear the fumes. When I'd had enough of that, I turned the key to the ignition switch. Then she blew! The flame from the engine compartment was about six feet tall. Let me tell you, it is pretty scary being on a burning boat at a fuel dock. However, the fire was put out without much fuss and we were out

boating within two hours. My wife counts that event as maintenance issue No. 1.

I really should be ashamed of myself for my attitude towards engines and maintenance. I am, after all, a powerboat designer and specify engines for all our projects. I am just not a gearhead. Most guys love engines, but I just take them for granted. I owned a BMW 6 series for eight years and never even opened the hood to look at the engine. My idea of checking the oil on my boat is to pump the bilge and if it's clean, then the oil must still be in the engine, so we are good to go!

There is a famous story about Carl Kiekhaefer, founder of Mercury Marine: An engineer in his office needed to borrow a car one day and Mr. K offered the use of his. So the guy goes down and gets into the car and drives up to the guard gate. The guard stops the engineer and says Mr. K has put a hold on the car, call the office. Kiekhaefer then tells the engineer, "Don't ever drive one of my vehicles without first checking the oil!" I am the proud recipient of the 1990 Kiekhaefer Award for Innovation in Offshore Racing. I am sure Mr. K would not approve of my maintenance issues. □