

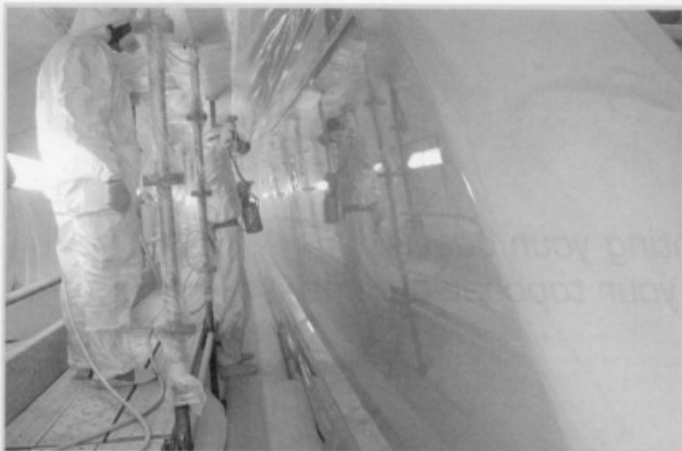
NOTE: You may have to zoom in to make the print larger on page 2

*Painting your boat?
Here are your topcoat options.*

MIRROR REFLECTION

BY PETE MCDONALD

For most production boatbuilders, there's only one way to get that gleaming fiberglass finish: gelcoat. But at Hatteras Yachts, though all of the fiberglass still gets an external skin of gelcoat, the flawless finish comes from an additional step in the production process. Hatteras is one of the very few builders in the world that paints every boat. And, says Eric Cashion, Hatteras marketing director, there's a good reason why. "We believe there are two kinds of boats—those that have been painted and those that will be painted."



A good paint job will make even a tired, old hull look like it did when it was brand new.

Why do most builders choose gelcoat over paint? Cost. Applying gelcoat in the mold is far faster and much less labor-intensive than painting a finished boat, and it doesn't involve an extra step in the production process. Plus gelcoat is less prone to showing marks and abrasions than paint. But it does have its drawbacks, the principal one being that it's more susceptible to dulling from UV breakdown and oxidation; it takes a lot of waxing and buffing to keep gelcoat looking like new over the life of a boat.

On the other hand, paint is more UV-resistant and usually won't break down over time, leaving you with a chalky, faded hull that looks older and more beat up than it really is. "With paint, vessels look newer for longer," Cashion says. "That's the biggest reason we do it."

There are basically two types of marine paint: polyester and acrylic. Marine acrylic paint is derived from the automotive product, which is formulated to dry quickly so it can accommodate a mass-production schedule. It is softer and easier to spot-repair than polyester-based paint, but it is also easier to scratch. Acrylics are also more susceptible to chemical reactions; they don't hold up well when exposed to diesel fuel, diesel soot, leaking hydraulic fluid, teak cleaner, and all the other little drips and dribbles that are common to boating.

Polyester marine paints come to us from the aviation industry, where they must endure speeds in excess of 500 mph. Besides being more scratch-resistant than acrylics, they hold up much better to chemical expo-

sure and UV light, which is why most builders use polyester paints, especially on larger boats.

"You won't see acrylic on a megayacht," advises Tripp Nelson, sales and marketing manager for Alexseal in the United States. "Most of the time they dock side-to, and the pressure from those large fender balls would wreck acrylic. You need a very tough paint."

Besides durability, a key criterion for any paint is its depth of gloss. When you stand next to a hull that's been properly painted, you should see your mirror image looking back at you. The better the paint, the longer your image will hold true as you move away from the boat. That's why a quick way to measure depth of gloss is with a tape measure. Put the end against the hull and move back until you can no longer clearly read the numbers in the paint. The highest number that you can clearly read is the depth of gloss.

But gloss can be quantified in a more scientific way. Professional painting operations rely on a machine called a gloss meter to provide a specific measurement of a paint's gloss. Quality paints that have been properly applied will produce a gloss-meter reading between 85 and 92. Though acrylics can produce similar gloss-meter numbers, experts say that polyester paints provide a more distinct image.

If the Gun's Out,
the Sun's Out



It may look and sound like something Han Solo, the galaxy-hopping hero from *Star Wars*, would have used, but the PPS Sun Gun Color Matching Light Kit (\$427.45) from 3M actually serves a much more terrestrial purpose—one that promises to save its owners both time and money. The Sun Gun is a portable source of simulated daylight that will help both do-it-yourselfers and professional shops alike perfect their gelcoating and paint finishing applications.

The hand-held gun uses a halogen bulb to "shoot" a natural-daylight-mimicking ray of light at any given surface. So, regardless of whether you are indoors under meddlesome fluorescent or incandescent lighting, or even just outside on a cloudy day, you can ensure precisely how your gelcoat or paint job will look out on the water under a radiant sky.

The gun effectively eliminates the time and energy wasted on waiting for the sun to come out and then rolling the boat outside to check its color matching. As a bonus, it doubles as a high-powered flashlight that helps detect surface defects such as swirl marks and scratches, thereby eliminating the need for costly multiple paint or gelcoat applications.

Combine those benefits with a built-in cooling fan and a thermal protection shut off that prevents overheating, and we guess you could say the Sun Gun really is out of this world. —Kevin Koenig

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