

# Is everything OK?

## Pre-departure boat checks



It would be nice to think you can just step onboard your boat, slip lines and head out for the day, but taking a little time to make some simple checks will result in a happier and safer cruise.

Before the start of the ARC we sat down in Las Palmas with Bryan Walker and Stewart Coultous, professional delivery skippers with PYD (Professional Yacht Deliveries Ltd). Bryan and Stewart have over 350,000NM logged on deliveries alone, and unlimited experience in preparing all types of boat for making a safe passage.



### Check Like the Professionals

Professional delivery crews will take at least 24 hours to look over a boat before leaving port. This time allows them to go over every inch of the boat and equipment, assessing any potential problems. This may sound extreme if you are just going out for a weekend on the water, so we've distilled Bryan and Stewart's advice to suit the average cruiser. (All the Rally Handbooks contain a comprehensive guide for preparing to go ocean sailing.)



**“The first thing to do when getting down to your boat is to take a good look around” says Bryan “Does she look ‘right’? Your eyes are the best first check.”**

### Does it Look Right?

#### Check:

- The boat is sitting in the water as she normally does, not bow- or stern-down
- Walk around the deck looking at every piece of gear carefully
- Make sure there are no screws, split pins or other vital parts lying on the deck
- The steering wheel feels secure and that there is no excessive play
- The rig, looking for chafe, broken strands and rust – use binoculars to check the upper parts

1 Stewart (left) with Fair Lady's owners ready for ARC 2011

2 Bryan Walker and Stewart Coultous

3 Bryan (right) and PYD crew with Bandido's owners ready for ARC 2011

4 Oyster 625 Bandido wrapped up for her Atlantic crossing



## Down Below

"Once you are happy that everything on deck is right, go below. On first going below see if everything looks (and smells) normal. It helps if you keep the boat tidy, so you can quickly spot any problems. Once you are happy, you can make more detailed checks."

### Check:

- For liquid in the bilges – water (fresh or salt), oil or fuel – if yes, then find the source
- For deck or window leaks – any damp patches on the furnishings
- Each seacock opens freely and that other through-hull fittings (transducers etc) are secure
- The charge levels in the batteries are as expected
- Fuel and water levels in the tanks

## The Engine

Stewart adds: "Before you start the engine, check it over for oil or water leaks. If you know a filter needs to be changed, then this is a good time to do it while the engine is cold."

### Check:

- There are no oily or wet marks suggesting a leak – check the sump seal too
- Cooling water seacock is open and turns freely
- The cooling water filter is clear of debris
- The water level in the heat exchanger
- The fan belt is correctly tensioned
- Oil level
- Stern gland (depending upon type of engine and drive)
- You have spare water pump impellers, engine oil, gear box fluid, fan belts, oil and water filters and fuses onboard

"Start the engine and run up the revs out of gear - does the exhaust run properly, or are the gasses black? Drop the revs back and gently engage forward, then stern gears to check that everything is working properly. If anything is amiss, then stop and work out what the problem is -

it's always easier to fix ashore than at sea!"

"It's a good idea to carry out these checks every day on passage" continues Bryan "We make it part of the watch change system - the on-coming watch completes the log book with the boat's position, course, speed and weather observations, then checks the engine, bilges and electrics. That way they are prepared when they come on watch, and the checks get done regularly. Even making a formal check once a day will save time and money in the long-term."

## Clean and Comfortable Onboard

"We always like to return the boat in a better condition than we find it" says Stewart. "That means protecting the varnish, stainless and upholstery with plastic padding, and having strict rules about taking off wet-weather gear, and where you allow liquids on the boat – we drink our coffee in the galley or on deck!"

Taking care of your own boat will keep her looking nice, and

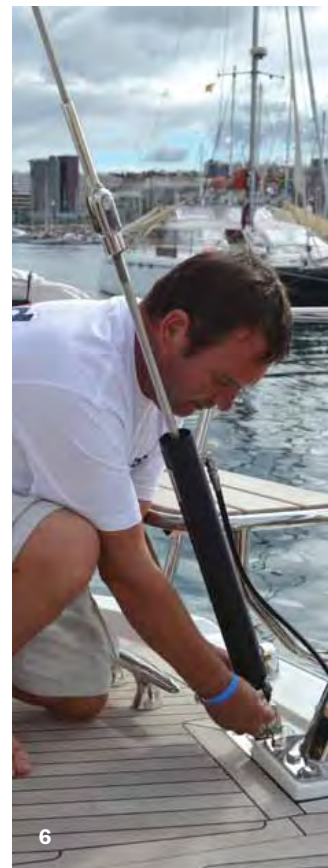
save you money in maintenance. You may prefer to enjoy your woodwork rather than protecting it, but having waterproof (and sun cream-proof) offshore cushion covers is a good idea.

- Stop staining by washing the decks down with sea water before refuelling or bringing a fish onboard
- If you have a sugar-scoop transom, this is the best place to clean fish. Just clip-on first!
- Heave-to when preparing food and eating at sea. It makes life more comfortable, saves spills and only adds a few minutes to your passage time

### Stewart has the last word:

"When you return to port, give the boat a good wash and scrub down. Seriously, giving the deck gear like blocks, clutches, furling drums, winches and lines a proper wash-off in fresh water not only helps them to last longer (salt corrodes), but also enables you to have a good close look at any chafe and wear; catching problems before they happen."

Thanks to Professional Yacht Deliveries [www.pydww.com](http://www.pydww.com)



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- 1 Bryan Walker checking halyard clutches
- 2 Rig checking
- 3 Dipping the oil level