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Ask The Captain

Capt. Lyman Louis

Winter Cruising

When the days get shorter and the temperature falls many boaters disappear into their homes. That leaves the rest of us, whose passion for the river overwhelms our better judgment, to enjoy quieter cruises. Less traffic on the river translates into more slips at the marine parks and better access to popular anchorages.

There are some things to consider when you leave the moorage these days. For example, the water is colder and an accidental dip in the drink could end with devastating consequences. Discretion being the better part of valor, always wear your personal flotation device (life jacket) when cruising this time of year.

Also remember that there is a lot more debris in the water these days. If you're cruising at night, don't forget that the logs are still out there so keep your speed down a bit. And the water, in general, is down quite a bit. A couple of weeks ago I salvaged a boat that hit bottom hard on the Willamette River. The boat was saved, but the experience and expense could have been avoided.

When you leave your slip, take along the same sort of provisions you would if you were driving through an icy night. In the event a heater or generator fails you don't want to find out how good—or bad—your boat's insulation is.

Play it safe with plenty of warm blankets and extra provisions.

In that vein, also take along some extra mechanical supplies. With fewer boaters on the water you're less likely to flag down a Good Samaritan when you really need one. The River Patrol is working winter hours these days so their ability to provide assistance may also be reduced.

All that said, this is some of the best cruising time of the year. It's not all that cold yet and the scenery is stunning. If you haven't made the trip recently I can strongly suggest a trip down the Multnomah Channel while there are still some leaves on the trees. Government and Lady Islands are also looking great and the view of Mt. Hood is getting better now that she's got some snow on her.

So don't put your boat away just yet. Get out and enjoy some of the best cruising days we've got in the region.

Letters

In response to my column last month on wakes, Mark Anderson writes:

As a compass adjuster, I'm very familiar with the effects of the wakes of passing boats. I often wish that everyone had a chance to experience the effects of their boats wake in the manner I often do while adjusting a compass on another's boat.

To properly adjust a compass requires calm water, so I often go out very early in the morning, before too many others are on the river. My favorite spot is just downriver of buoy 14 on the Columbia, where the river is wide and I can be South of the Channel, just in case a commercial vessel passes. When just one other boat passes by, even if near the shore and not close to me, the effect of their wake is amazing. It doesn't seem to matter if it's simply a small fishing boat going by at full speed or a tow boat with a

barge, the wake will stir up a otherwise calm river in an amazing way.

The energy of the wake will bounce off the shores over and over, rocking me so much that I often must pause my work, sometimes for as much as 10 - 15 minutes. It is no wonder that on a busy day on the Columbia River there is so much chop and turbulence.

The important thing to remember, is to be courteous to each other. When we pass by others, our wake will effect them. When we live or play on the river, we will be effected by others wakes. Water is a fluid medium and will never be as solid and calm as the "hard."

Neither shooting a flare at a passing boat from a floating home or speeding by Hadley's Landing and bouncing 20 boats violently into each other is ever justified.

Dear Mark,

Thanks for your e-mail. Compass adjusters are not the only workers who have to wait for calm waters to do their jobs. I had the pleasure of watching a ship surveyor do his work recently. As the launch circled the ship the surveyor watched the draft marks as the nearly still waters moved up and down. Just as we circled the stern of the ship to take the last reading, a ski boat raced by and kicked out a fair sized wake.

Since these readings determine how much cargo can be placed on the ship it's an important determination both in terms of safety and economics. The surveyor was able to get the reading just before the wake arrived but the point is a good one.

We've all got to share the same body of water. We all need to keep courtesy in mind while we are out there.

Winterization

A couple of winterizing items that may not be on your checklist. What is the status of your personal floatation devices (life jackets)? If these are more than a few years old it may be time to replace them. Give them a good inspection including a dip in the drink.

Check your throwable (Type IV's) PFDs too. If you have one of those seat cushion types that gets used for a cushion, it's probably only good for one or two seasons. They're not that expensive compared to their value if you need them.

Fire extinguishers need to be inspected on a monthly basis. Look at the gauge and check that it is in the acceptable operating range. If not, have it recharged or replaced. But the gauge is not error proof and, as someone who has used a lot of fire extinguishers, it's a real problem when you pull the trigger and nothing happens.

Here's a couple of additional tests you should include in your fire extinguisher inspection. If you have a dry chemical extinguisher, tip it upside down and back a couple of times. The chemical sits in the bottom all year and may start to solidify. When you turn it over you should be able to feel the chemical agent moving.

All extinguishers have a weight printed on them. Put yours on a scale to compare its current weight to the minimum weight required for that extinguisher. If the extinguisher is not within the weight range have it recharged or replaced.

Similarly, if you have smoke and/or carbon monoxide detectors, check that they're operable. If they have batteries now is a good time to replace them.

Finally, if you keep your boat in the water all year, make sure that all of your contact information is correct. Don't forget to update your emergency contact information too. Make sure that the people you've charged with keeping

an eye on your boat have every possible opportunity to inform you if something goes wrong.

Fair winds and following seas,
Capt. Lyman