

Topcoat Part 3

Series

BY STEVE ROSENBERG

Understanding Top Coat

With all the different options out there, how do you know what paint is right for your boat?

It wasn't so long ago that the only real choice you had before getting your topside repainted was what color you liked best. Now, the technologies behind top-coat paints have become so complicated, it's hard to know where to start. The good news, of course, is that, with advanced technology, come incredible steps forward in durability, ease of maintenance, and the finished look of your new paint job.

Choosing the right paint and process can be challenging, but with a little information, you will be talking the talk in no time. To help guide you through the process, we've spoken to experts at several major paint manufacturers. This month, we'll take a look at some of the different types of top-coat paint to help you narrow down your options.

Tripp Nelson, Alexseal Yacht Coatings:

With the number of paint options out there, it's important to really think about the area to be refinished. Not all areas will require the exact same results. Let's say you wanted to repaint a helm station on a yacht and that area had to be perfectly flawless. You didn't want any texture, dirt or defects whatsoever because you wanted to be able to polish the helm station. In that case, you may want to choose an acrylic polyurethane, similar to automotive paints, because it's softer, and it's much easier to polish. That's an example of where one product might be more suited than another.

If you're looking at non-skid areas, you do have the option with the different paints to choose your texture. You





Interlux Half boat project: Office and factory workers restored half of this boat to show what two part polyurethane can do.

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can add a plastic bead to the paint to obtain a fine non-skid surface if you are going to be sitting on the area and you're not worried about the safety aspect. You can also choose to have a coarser non-skid area such as on the bow deck. You can tailor the non-skid surface with these polyurethane paints just by adding different amounts of beads to them.


Jack Hickey, Blue Water Marine Paint:

Deciding on the finished look you're after really drives the steps you'll take choosing a top-coat product. Some finishes require special application methods and specific skills such as spraying or tent drying. If you want the maximum in longevity and appearance and you've chosen a polyurethane finish and the appropriate system of primers and filling/fairing compounds, you should be asking for the marina, boatyard or painting contractor for their experience with spray techniques and any available testimonials to their experience, such as previous boats he has repainted. In general, the service or use of the boat hull to be painted has little to do with the choice of topcoat system; however, the life expectancy, inherent durability and both initial and longer-term appearance usually drives the choices.

One thing to remember when planning your painting project is that your choice of topcoats, primers and compounds should all come from a single manufacturer if possible. This can alleviate any liability questions incurred as a result of a paint-system failure. Failures are rare but it is always a good idea to stay with one vendor for the products to be applied as well as the marine, boatyard or contractor used.

Jim Seidel, Interlux Yacht Finishes:

Marine alkyd enamels are single-part paints. They use synthetically produced resins that give good coverage and hide. They are easy to use and flow out well. Another option is a single-package polyurethane that uses a blend of alkyd and urethane resins that are more durable than marine alkyd enamels. They have excellent gloss, gloss retention and provide excellent abrasion resistance. Finally, you have two-part polyester polyurethane products with a hard, abrasion-resistant coating with high gloss and extreme durability. Two-part polyurethanes come in two types, polyester polyurethane and acrylic polyurethane. Polyester polyurethanes were originally developed for the aircraft industry and are hard abrasion resistant coatings that are very durable but are difficult to repair. Acrylic polyurethanes were developed for the automotive market where there was need for a hard coating that was easier to repair if it became scratched or nicked. They dry faster than polyester polyurethanes and can be buffed for a higher gloss if necessary. While polyester polyurethanes are the most popular type used in the yacht market, acrylic polyurethanes are used because of ease and speed of application and their ability to be repaired easily.

Coming next month: We'll look at the best ways to maintain your new paint job and different methods of removing stains and minor damage. 

Steve Rosenberg is the former editorial director of Boating World magazine and now writes exclusively about boating and yachting.