

Fair or foul



Antifouling paints are becoming more ecologically friendly and more advanced. Jake Kavanagh explains how to get the most mileage from your freshly painted bottom, and looks at what's coming in the future

Antifouling has come a long way since 1625. That was when William Beale registered the first patent for a toxic underwater paint – a strange concoction of iron powder, cement and copper. How effective it was we have no idea, but it was the opening shot in a long war against weed and barnacles.

We've come a long way since then, and the modern boat owner has a huge range of hi-tech antifoulings to choose from.

In the last two issues of PBO (471-472) we looked at copper resin antifouling with trade names such as Cuprotect, Coppershield and Coppercoat. They work by suspending a pure copper powder in an epoxy resin which is rolled on to the hull in a series of layers. It's effective, as we discovered, but there is a relatively high initial cost in getting it on, plus, it only comes in one colour – verdigris green.

A halfway house has just been launched by Flag Paints, who have developed a copper powder suspended in a polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) resin to give the same effect as using epoxy, but as a quick-drying pre-mixed paint (for more details see New Gear on p110).

But for those who prefer more conventional antifouling, there are plenty of paints (and colours) to choose from. These can be divided into two main types – hard and eroding.

1 Hard antifoulings

Hard antifoulings are mainly for racing yachts and fast motorboats, and are designed to be scoured clean by high speeds, or simply with a scrubbing brush. They are also recommended for use on



Performance boats need hard antifouling

Antifouling also gives you the chance to examine the hull of your boat in detail



In addition to gloves and headgear, it's a good idea to wear some eye protection when antifouling

boats in mud berths. The toxic properties of the paint are tightly packed into a hard layer, which remains once the toxins have been exhausted. After several years of recoating, the build-up needs to come off – which can be messy and time consuming.

2 Eroding antifoulings

Eroding (or self polishing) antifoulings are designed to gently wear away during the season, rather like a bar of soap, and are generally regarded as being maintenance-free. This is because fresh biocide is constantly being exposed, and any growth

falls away with erosion. Eventually the paint will disappear altogether to expose the bare substrate. This type of paint doesn't like being scrubbed, and all you'll get if you try is a cloud of colour in the water and a shorter life for what's left.

All new antifouling paints have to go through rigorous testing and approval regimes before being released onto the market – which tends to make them expensive. For this article, we asked the manufacturers how we can get the very best from their products, especially in high-fouling areas.