

Cockpit problems

Again, most of the problems stem from freshwater penetration that, thinking about it is pretty obvious if the cockpit is not fully sealed or protected from rain with good fitting cockpit covers etc. It can often be found that larger sections of cockpit panelling have to be replaced because of water collection in the lower corners that eventually migrates into the plywood panelling if fitted.

The cockpit sole is supported on, very often, softwood beams that are not as resistant to freshwater decay as might be.

On vessels fitted with a high bridge deck such as many of the Buchanan designs, this bridge deck will often deteriorate from the corners outwards because of freshwater problems. The best care for a timber cockpit has to be a close fitting waterproof cover. Structurally, there are no major recurring problems other than freshwater decay with the majority of well designed and constructed cockpits.



With a well maintained cockpit, water damage is obvious immediately.

In some cases you will come across damage caused by heavy loadings on slightly ill supported sheet winches, particularly when these sheet winches are fitted to the cockpit sides or coamings and it is obvious that when highly loaded the coaming is flexing

Many timber vessels might not have a self draining cockpit, Most Hillyards do not, but most owners have no concerns over their seaworthiness.

But this does allow fresh water build up if not protected. .

Always fit a cover for wooden cockpits, especially no-self draining

Timber spars

Timber spars have a particular attraction if they have been well maintained and well built. They are generally not as heavy as one might imagine as, on modern vessels they will generally be hollow and not solid as they appear.

They are constructed by gluing sections of straight timber together to form a box or, in some cases a round spar and fairing back to shape.



This is a hollow mast but a solid section at the bottom has been compromised over many years by water penetration. The white paint has obscured the continuing deterioration until it broke upon removal for survey

There are solid sections fitted at the base, the top, and positions of spreaders. The main fault that these spars suffer from is that the timber used which will either be spruce or Colombian pine is not the most durable therefore they will be affected by water ingress at the base of the mast which stands on the deck and the top of the mast if it is unprotected and at the point of spreader rig attachments were water can lie between the fittings and the timber.

The other area where masts built in the 1960s can suffer from is glue line failure, this is where the original glue is starting to fail due to age.

This can be seen as a slight, although sometimes obvious, opening along the line of the glue. The timber and varnish will also be discoloured



Here can be seen major glue line failure on a scarf joint extending onto the side section of boom

This can be rectified in various ways depending upon the extent of failure, one method in minor failure is to rout section of glue line failure accurately and fit a spline with more modern glues such as epoxy or polyurethane or, in the case of significant glue line failure, separate the sections and rebuild with more modern glues. However, if glue line failure has been allowed to remain unattended to for any length of time and fresh water has found its way into the heart of the mast, causing significant freshwater decay, the mast may well be near the end of its useful life.

Painted masts to have to be suspect as, it is impossible to see the condition of the timber accurately and, possibly more importantly any glue line failures can be temporarily obscured. Varnish is much more acceptable and easier to note any obvious structural faults present.

Usually, the boom on vessels up to approximately 40 ft. will be solid. The only fault they suffer from other than decay is slight loss of straightness that, is not particularly significant but not easy to correct.

Many timber vessels would have been fitted with galvanised rigging, this is not subject to 10 or twelve year replacement as is stainless, and it is subject to visual inspection looking for excessive rust or other obvious damage.

The faults that stainless suffers as shown in the photo does not affect galvanised to the same degree.

If you are content with a degree of maintenance after about 5 years by coating with boiled linseed oil, you can expect a lifetime in excess of thirty years in some cases.



Stainless wire showing work hardened & broken strands at the swage. Galvanised does not suffer the same fault generally

It is essential to use the correct layup for the standing rigging, some have inadvertently used flexible wire.

In these cases the filaments are so fine that they do corrode exceptionally quickly once started, and fail unexpectedly.