

The Fine Art of Judging Antifouling Paint Performance

Our bottom paint findings are based on the analysis of antifouling-coated fiberglass panels that have been immersed in salt water and removed once every six months for a checkup. The article above focuses on panels that have been immersed since June of 2008. The results are tabulated on pages 8 and 9. For a closer look at the two-year results on separate sets of panels, see page 10.

Each test involves duplicate fiberglass panel sets: One set is suspended in a canal in Key Largo, Fla.; its twin is immersed in a marina in Stamford, Conn. Following the manufacturers' instructions for preparation and number of coats (usually two coats), testers apply eight to 12 samples per 6-foot-by-2-foot-long panel. Column entries in the tables reflect performance in each locale.

Prior to rating, testers rinse the panels with a bucket of saltwater. Paints are rated Excellent (no growth), Good (light growth), Fair (moderate to heavy soft growth), and Poor (hard growth). The Good and Fair ratings are judged relative to results within each panel set, so a paint that scored Fair at the one-year mark might bump up to Good at the two-year review

as the relative performance of other paints slips. Any paint that rates Fair or better has done its job, in our opinion.

A Recommended paint is one that performed best overall or rated best among its specialized peers (best aluminum-safe paint, best water-based paint, best racing paint, etc.). The Budget Buy paints represent the least expensive among Recommended paints. Prices are based on an average of advertised prices. They do not include shipping. Because these are hazardous materials, you can save some by buying from a local distributor.

If you're a Northeast boater who hauls out and repaints every year, the one-year results are a good guide. Stick to the cheaper Recommended paints that match your requirements, otherwise, you'll be paying for protection you don't need. If you want to haul and relaunch without painting, or you want two years or more of continuous protection, the two-year results are a better guide.

Keep in mind that our test is subject to a number of variables and we recommend supplementing our data with local knowledge from other independent sources.