

# 22 Paints Fend off Barnacles at 2-year Mark

In the days when antifouling agent tributyl tin (now banned worldwide) was still readily available, cruising sailors could get three solid years out of their bottom paint. In those three years, they would have to clean the bottom with a sponge or brush, but as long as their boats were moving and they didn't linger too long in sunny, nutrient-rich estuaries, they'd usually be barnacle free.

Not so today. If you are getting two good years out of your sailboat bottom paint, without the need to sponge, scrub, or scrape, you are doing well.

The facing Value Guide shows the best performing antifouling paints of two sets of 72 paints that have been continuously submerged for 24 months. The testing protocol differed slightly from the one used for our 12-month panels. (See "How We Tested," on page 13.) While the paints on the 12-month test panels were immersed in two locations in Florida, these panel sets were tested at opposite sides of the Mason-Dixon line. One set of 72 paints was dunked in Connecticut on Long Island Sound, the other in the Florida Keys. The Connecticut panels were rated at the six-, 12- and 24-month intervals. The Florida panels were rated at the six-, 12-, 18-, and 24-month intervals. The best-rated paints were chosen based on their cumulative ratings at the end of 24 months.

To make the 24-month list, a paint must rate Good at 18 months or longer, have no Poor ratings, and at least one other Good during the rating period, or it must have the best cumulative rating score in its category (water based, aluminum friendly, etc.).

Interestingly, a higher percentage of hard paints from the

original field made the 24-month. Many of these hard paints carry more than 50 percent copper by weight, enabling them to provide lasting protection for full-time sailors.

Generally, hard paints don't like to be out of the water, so they aren't a good choice for sailors who plan to be out of the water for more than 30 days and relaunch without re-coating. On a newly painted boat, however—or one that has been in the water for less than 30 days—you can reactivate many of these paints with a light sand, or scuffing with a 3M Scotchbrite pad shortly before launching. If you intend to be out of the water for a long period after painting, check with the paint manufacturer on what special measures you might need to take.

Interlux and Sea Hawk each had seven contenders in this field. Interlux scored with its three Micron-series abrasives, its two high-copper Ultra paints, and its popular racing paint VC Offshore. Sea Hawk landed two of the least expensive paints, water-based Monterey, which we previously field tested (March 2008), and its Sharkskin (\$100), a paint that landed in the 24-month winners' circle in 2008. Another return winner from Sea Hawk was its Biocop TF, which we are currently field testing along with Micron 66 on a boat in Chesapeake Bay.

Pettit had two abrasives, Ultima SR60 and the water-based abrasive Hydrocoat (also sold as West Marine Pure Oceans), along with its two hard Trinidad paints, perennial contenders in our long-term test. Blue Water also had two paints in each category; all of them, interestingly, were the paints boosted with Irgarol biocide. No low-copper paint made it to the two-year mark, although several made it to 18 months (March 2010), with Epaint ZO and Pettit Alumacoat being the cleanest.