

Spare me the trouble

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JEFF MERRILL



multiple consequences. Being ready for the unknown is an important part of “dialing-in” your trawler.

I’ve been told by more than one owner that you learn about your trawler one breakdown at a time. Though it would be nice to think that everything will always work flawlessly, that is not reality.

Key points on spare parts

- It’s easier to make a repair tied up at the dock. Do you have what you need when you are offshore?
- Determine what is likely to be commonly replaced (bulbs, fuses) and add spares to your inventory.
- Figure out what would really ruin your day (broken toilet) and purchase rebuild kits.
- Learn where the serviceable items are installed on your boat and diagram those locations.
- Make sure you have the right parts and the correct tool to make a change out.
- Organize your spares logically so you can find them when you need them.

Jeff Merrill

Editor’s note: This is Part 1 of a two-part series on making sure you have the spares you need for your power voyaging boat.

Above, a good spare parts strategy can keep a power voyaging yacht going no matter what. Right, using bins for organizing spares.

As an offshore cruiser, what is your strategy for spare parts? Spare parts are, unfortunately, rarely considered a priority. In fact, for most boaters they are often



an afterthought, “extras” that are haphazardly collected “just in case” and stowed “somewhere” that will be hard to find when they are needed. You won’t need them until there is a problem, but if you are prepared they can help get you out of trouble.

Have you ever been in a situation where you were on board and away from land when a vital system faltered? If so, you will remember that things changed quickly if they were not addressed promptly. What may start out as a nuisance can quickly evolve into a very serious situation with

Boats, by their nature, are designed to be jostled around in a harsh marine environment and quite simply there is a lot of stress and common failures. You must accept that you need to expect the unexpected.

Seasoned trawler owners develop checklists and do inspections to make sure they are good to go. Obvious practices like provisioning for food and filling up with fuel and water, along with studying the weather, become second nature. We confidently plan for the best, but need to consider the worst. Less-experienced boat handlers need to spend some time comprehending the inherent idiosyncrasies of trawler systems and operations. My suggestion is to make a written list of all of your machinery (engines, generators, stabilizers, thrusters, windlass, etc.) starting with manufacturer and model number and then go online to research the details and collect information. You should have the operations manual and parts catalog for everything (I prefer electronic versions on PDF so I can search on my computer). Good manuals and catalogs will not only identify the various components, but may dictate service intervals, tools required and recommended spare parts.

Before your next trip, read up on your engine and learn as much as you can. We are

all familiar with fuel and oil filters and know they need to be changed out, but have you ever done this? If you are a hands-on owner you most likely have, but if you trust this type of work to a professional, they may not be around at 3 a.m., 20 miles off the coast in a rolling sea ... so it would be wise to learn some of the basic replacement skills for regularly serviced components.

Do you have the correct spare parts and the tools for the job? A strap wrench or filter wrench with a bucket and some diaper absorption pads (and a roll of paper towels) make changing a fuel or oil filter a lot less messy. Try this while tied up to the dock — you don't want on-the-job training if your filters clog up while you are underway.

There are a number of ways to dissect the importance of spare parts; here is how I view them:

Routine spares, consumables: This would include machinery items like filters (Racor, oil and fuel filters), belts and impellers. Labeling your filters with the date and



time will let you know when they are due to be changed. Don't forget your engine air filters. So much depends upon how often you use your trawler, but a good recommendation is to change out filters and impellers at a minimum of once per year and carry multiple spares. One of my clients, an experienced circumnavigator, made up three oil change bins so he had everything he needed to become an instant



mechanic. Belts will show signs of dust as an indicator that they are nearing their end. Raw-water sea strainer gaskets and baskets can “dissolve” over time and you can't really fashion a replacement with parts aboard. Hull zincs and pencil zincs provide anode protection and are inexpensive to inventory but heavy to ship, so I suggest stocking up on these.

Bottom left, spare hose lengths for quick hose repairs. Left, fuel filters labeled to show service life. Above, it's a good idea to mark your pencil zincs.



Above, make sure you have the right fuses for your gear. Right, spare fuses ready to go. Bottom, good labeling helps.



Breakers and fuses:

Many of the electrical systems on your trawler are designed with fuses or breakers that will trip to prevent elec-

trical surges that can overload and harm devices. Having an assortment of fuses and breakers on board is essential but requires some upfront research to determine correct sizes and quantities. You may require a specialty fuse for your davit, so get a spare. Remember, in a pinch you may be able to substitute a working fuse from another component (be especially careful around AC systems). Knowing the size and type plus where they are installed will save you a lot of time when something stops running and you are trying to figure out what happened. Better yet, wire-tie a spare to the fuse cover. Good electrical wiring diagrams are invaluable resources when you need to locate where your replacement

goes; you can mark them up with Post-Its for quick identification.

Serviceable parts: These are not routine but common enough. This would include items like duckbill valves for toilets. In fact, it would be a good idea to purchase a complete head rebuild kit. Windshield wipers wear out (or keep Rain-X on board). Anti-siphon vents are often overlooked and can usually be cleaned out, but you first need to know where they are installed. Light bulbs burn out. Good working running lights are critical; carry spare bulbs or consider upgrading these to LED.

Fluids: An entire sermon could be written about the fluids you need to monitor and replenish, including engine oil, engine coolant, transmission oil, stabilizer oil, hydraulic steering oil and more. Figure out what you need and how you will stow the containers. You also need funnels for filling. Lubricants and greases, cans and tubes of all kinds of important products should be aboard. I don't really view these as spare parts, but they too should be in your inventory.

Breakables: Everything can break and it is impractical to carry a backup for each item on your boat. If you are using boom winches, I would carry a spare. It's not much fun trying to use a halyard to

hoist up a dinghy stuck in the water (make sure the spare winch is the same model and/or the bracket hole pattern matches). Pumps, and there are many types aboard, are notorious for giving out at the wrong time — actually, there is never a good time. I advise my clients to adopt the view that everything on a boat lasts for five years. That is a short cycle in the life of your boat, so be proactive and keep track of your equipment with a critical eye. Anticipate issues by tackling annoyances before they develop into problems.

In Part 2, we will look at determining a spare parts strategy by envisioning where are you most vulnerable. ■

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