

Personal Watercraft Maintenance

by Carl Haensel

photos by the author



(Above) Use fogging oil to help prevent engine rust and corrosion during storage of your two-stroke PWC. This photo shows applying the oil into a cylinder of a two-stroke PWC after removing the spark plug.

(Right) Recreational vehicle antifreeze should be ran through your PWC before storage for the winter to ensure that there are no cracked or leaking parts due to freezing and thawing water. Make sure to appropriately dispose of antifreeze and any other chemicals that you use when maintaining your PWC.



Operating your personal watercraft (PWC) in the summer can be a lot of fun. As summer progresses, there are many steps that you should take to keep your PWC operating well and to prepare it for storage during the off-season. While there are many different makes and models of PWCs on the market, they all have similar maintenance needs.

Stay safe and stay legal

One important part of maintaining your PWC is to make sure that you have fulfilled all the legal requirements to operate your boat. Make sure that it is currently registered and numbered before your first trip out each season. Every time you go out, check your fire extinguisher to make sure it is fully charged. A sound producing device, safety cut-off lanyard and life jacket in the appropriate size are required for each passenger as well. Full legal requirements can be found online at www.fishandboat.com.

Maintenance basics

Start off with keeping your boat in good shape. Keep your craft clean and looking good with PWC-specific cleaners and waxes. It's easier to spot problems and issues on a clean boat. Store your boat inside or with a boat cover. Sunlight and the elements take their toll on all PWCs and make more maintenance work for

you, the owner. Remember to add grease to all seals and bearing fittings. Inspect these areas several times a season to ensure that they are working properly. Lubricate parts as directed by the manufacturer at least once a year. Check all wires, trim and throttle cables and hatches for loose or damaged parts. It's frustrating to go boating on a beautiful day and watch a part of your PWC fly off and sink to the bottom of a lake. It's even worse to start boating and then not be able to steer or control your throttle due to poorly maintained parts.

Engine health

There are two basic types of PWC engines, two-stroke and four-stroke. They both have their own maintenance needs. Make sure you know which type of engine you have before working on it. The first and most important part of keeping your two-stroke PWC running well is making sure it never runs out of oil. The engine in your PWC mixes oil with the gas in its engine and uses up this oil quickly. There is a tank of oil under your seat, and it should be checked and filled regularly, preferably every time you add gas to the tank. A four-stroke PWC does not consume oil, but can run low. Start each trip by always checking the oil level in your four-stroke PWC. Add oil as needed, and change it as recommended by the manufacturer.

Long-term storage of your PWC

As summer turns into fall, then winter, storing your PWC for long periods of time takes special care to ensure that it will run well the next season. A few simple steps during the year will have it running in minutes the next time you're ready to go boating. ☐



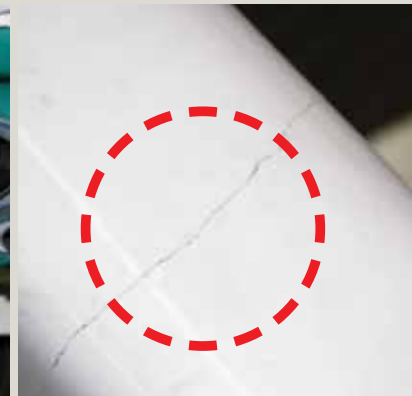
Add a fuel stabilizer to the gas tank of your PWC, and run it for a short period of time to prevent build-up from evaporating gasoline during storage.



Change the oil on your four-stroke PWC before storage or as often as the manufacturer recommends it. An oil extractor will make this process easy for you on a regular basis.



Inspect the discharge area of your PWC for damage from rocks and other items, and keep it in good working order. If you operate your PWC in saltwater, it should be flushed regularly in-season, in addition to flushing before storage.



Check your PWC throughout the season and before storage for serious structural damage such as this crack in the fiberglass. Only experienced experts should repair structural damages.

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