

WAGGONER CRUISING GUIDE

Extended Cruising Preparation

It's the time of year when boaters up and down the West Coast are looking forward to the cruising season and preparing to head out for one- or two-week trips, or for a summer of extended cruising, and they are establishing their to-do lists. If you're one of those boaters, what should be on your list?

- Complete regularly scheduled service.
- Conduct an engine room inspection.
- Check electrical systems.
- Exercise all systems to ensure operation.
- Spare parts.
- Do your homework.

An Ounce of Prevention

The first priority is to make sure you've done all the scheduled services recommended by your engine and transmission manufacturer. Be sure your fuel system is running cleanly by changing filters after taking the boat out and letting her roll around a bit. Make sure hoses are sound and are all doubled clamped with stainless hose clamps and that sea strainers on engine intakes reseal after you check and clean them. Check your fresh and saltwater pumps, and be sure to have either spares or rebuild kits, especially belts and impellers. Examine your stuffing boxes or dripless shaft seals for leakage and make sure shaft couplings nuts and bolts are tight.

When you look at your bilge with the presence of mind that you are going on an extended cruise. Check the bilge pumps to ensure the automatic switches and high water alarms work. Also, check that the hoses have a gooseneck or are well above the waterline to ensure they don't siphon water into the boat in rough seas. While in the bilge, check that all your thru-hulls are working.

Boats have complex electrical systems. Sitting at the dock doesn't show you if your batteries are really up to snuff or your alternator is properly working. Even a day cruise most often will not provide any indication of battery condition. But once you go out to the islands and sit at anchor for a couple of days, it will give you a good indication. Most extended cruising boaters rely on battery monitor/chargers to provide the data they need to stay on top of their electrical requirements and battery conditions. If you rely solely on your alternator to charge your batteries, suggest carrying a backup.

Check your ground tackle; invest in two good proven anchors a size larger than recommended for your boat's length and plenty of chain. All chain is the choice of most cruisers these days.

You want to be prepared to anchor in depths of 40-feet plus at a ratio of 5 to 7:1 in storm conditions. That's a lot of chain, but you'll sleep much better.

Next is to find the names and locations of authorized mechanics along your route. Also, make sure you have a service and parts manual; many technicians can help you if they have this information.

Purchase the right spares:

- Motor oil for top-offs
- Power-steering and transmission fluids
- Primary and secondary fuel filters
- Enough pre-mixed extended-life antifreeze to replace that in one engine and hydronic furnace.
- Impellers
- Toilet repair kit
- Freshwater pump
- Macerator
- Extra drive belts
- Gaskets and seals for sea strainers
- Replacement zincs for heat exchanges
- A selection of stainless steel hoses clamps, tie-wraps, and spare fuses

If you're leaving the country, you may want to carry an extra alternator, a complete sea-water pump, several spare injectors, and complete gasket set. Most engine manufacturers have "cruise kits" available with many of the items above.

And don't forget the right tools. Many manufacturer's maintenance manuals provide a complete list of tools required to perform maintenance and repair tasks.

Notice that almost all of the recommendations above include some test to be done away from the dock. Cruise away for a weekend, at least, to check out how your systems perform. And don't wait until the last minute to do it. While away from the dock check your electronics winch, thrusters, stabilizers, trim tabs, generator, inverter/charger, and furnace. Cook with your stove and BBQ, run your fridge and freezer and use your toilets. Life is not good if any of these don't work correctly.

The above tasks don't seem sexy while tied to the dock, but once you're free from the dock, nothing will make you feel more confident than faith in your essential systems.