

Common senses cruising

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JEFF MERRILL

What is that? That's a new and different smell/sound/vibration/leak ... something doesn't seem right. What happened? These are thoughts that pop into your mind when you are aboard and sense a change from the norm. A fast realization of a system going astray can save the day, as what might start out as an annoyance or mild concern can quickly escalate if unattended.

A small drip from your hydraulic reservoir may only require a quarter-turn of tightening on a fitting to stop it, but it could develop into the complete discharge of oil into the bilge if it isn't addressed promptly.

The more time we spend on our trawlers, the more obvious it becomes when things get out of whack. We develop internal baselines of what feels right and general observations.



Trust your intuition and use your judgment to diagnose and determine if a shift away from standard operating procedure has occurred. Realization identifies a change; then you need to assess and diagnose the cause and respond with a correction.

You don't need to have the training of an engineer or the talents of a mechanic to realize when a change has occurred. Sometimes a small detail can

have a huge potential impact on the big picture, so it is critical to train yourself to be alert and observant. Over time, you will develop some basic skills using onboard tools to make simple repairs. The key is to notice when something goes wrong, figure out the problem, come up with a solution and then take action.

Our trawlers are outfitted with equipment and machinery that will let us know when they are spinning like a top and also reveal when they are not in good working order. Analog gauges use needles to show pressure, sight glasses

Above, even on a large power voyager like this Delta 70 in Seattle, you should use all your senses to stay connected to the vessel. Left, an engine room with tools and spare parts; unusual noises heard here can be a tip-off.



reveal fluid levels, meters read voltage — there are numerous feedback devices providing information to help keep us on track, and it is imperative to learn what is normal and to continually monitor everything.



Top, a clean, dry bilge is always a good sight. Right, keeping an eye on gauges helps you monitor the health of a boat's systems.



As a professional yacht broker, I have been aboard thousands of yachts and attended hundreds of pre-purchase surveys. I am always looking for new tricks and devices that other boaters have discovered to help them more readily identify a change in the normal. The “Dialing-In Your Trawler” series here in *Ocean Navigator* has shared many of the great ideas I have discovered. I’m a proponent

of spreadsheets and checklists, and I recommend you write down and record temperatures, settings and other data by logging them in at regular intervals to make sure the onboard orchestra of systems stays in harmony.

It’s only natural that the more time you spend aboard, the more familiar you will become. Several of my trawler mentors have told me that they have learned the most about their boats one breakdown at a time. Obviously it’s best that breakdowns are avoided, so how can they be prevented? It’s as simple as paying attention.

Man-made machinery is wonderful but can have faults just like humans. You can keep in touch with your boat using multi-meters, infrared temperature guns and torque wrenches. These tools are very helpful, but don’t neglect your own natural ability to look, listen and sniff.

As a trawler owner, you need to consider how you can use your natural senses to help you keep your trawler “dialed-in” and running smoothly. Here’s a quick run-through on how you can take advantage of your common senses.

Sight. We are all very visual, so be on the lookout. Check gauges, valve positions, warning lights, etc. — there is so much to monitor. Make labels or marks to give you a

quick visual reference of what is typical. Consider wearing safety goggles to protect your eyes, particularly in machinery spaces, as it may prevent a spurt of oil from splashing into your eye. I encourage you to consider adding an eye-wash station as part of your onboard first aid preparation. Also, if you keep your engine room neat and tidy, it is easier to notice leaks and drips.

Hearing. There is a white noise effect from the humming of your engines underway that is soothing and inspires confidence. When the rpm changes, most cruisers will immediately sense this. In fact, on a long passage where I settle in on a certain speed, I use a change in rpm to summon all aboard to the pilothouse. Listen for new sounds and alarms. Protect your ears by wearing earmuffs in the engine room.

Smell. Your scent sense will find lots of different smells on a trawler, from fragrances to odors. If something doesn’t smell right, you could have a problem. Would you recognize what a burning wire smells like? Sewage smells are the worst, but don’t cover them up with pine-tree air fresheners like you’d see in a car. If your sanitation hoses are getting “whiffy,” you can take a soft clean rag and rub along the hose, then give it the smell test. If that waste smell has permeated the hose, it’s time to change it out.



Above, when alarms go off, especially at night when there is less input to your senses, they get your attention fast.

Touch. In my early trawler days, we would check the temperature of stuffing boxes by patting our hands on the shaft coupling and feeling how hot to the touch it was — a nice way to burn your hand. Nowadays, we use an infrared temperature gun to more accurately record values, a much safer approach. Keep in mind that you have a lot of fasteners on your boat. While underway at sea, your boat can take a pounding — rocking, rolling, shaking, rattling and vibrating — causing screws and nuts to loosen. Check your fittings and apply firm pressure through your tools to keep things tight.

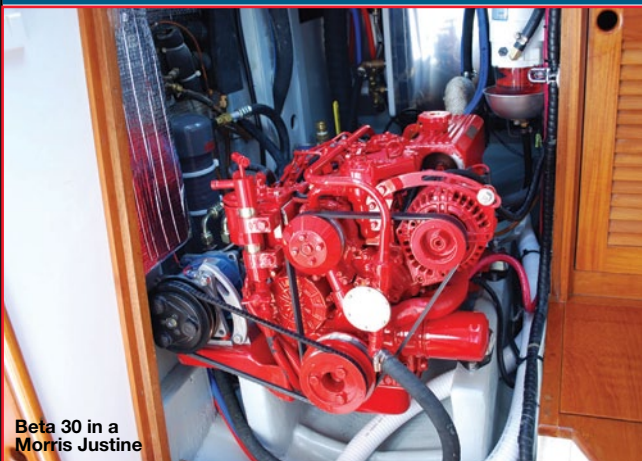
Taste. I like to call this a “non-

sense” as there is always a better way to identify a problem than tasting an encountered liquid. On land, it is not uncommon when you notice a fluid to dip your finger in and then tap it on your tongue. Is it sweet? Salty? Don’t do this on your trawler! You may have sewage, seawater or bacteria floating in your bilge. There are some nasty things in fluids that can cause great harm — just avoid it. I heard about a surveyor who got a life-threatening bacterial infection simply by doing a taste test. Save your taste buds for food prepared in the galley only.

Common sense. This trait is unevenly distributed at birth. It is a

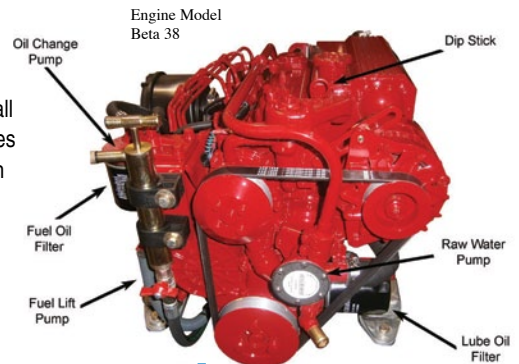
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Engine Model	Vessel
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blessing, and we all share the fundamental attributes to listen and look. Become one with your boat. Question if something doesn't seem right. Follow your instincts and remember that your first inclination is usually

the best. Our innate abilities can be bolstered through experience and self-teaching. We all have built-in know-how that is largely untapped. Open up yourself to all your senses and become one with your trawler.

A heightened sense of awareness will pay off by helping you find potential problems at earlier stages when they are easiest to fix. Every trawler has idiosyncrasies and its own personality, so get to know your boat.

Think about how you respond to changing situations on land. Have you ever noticed that when you are driving your car and something seems wrong (a wobble or scraping sound, low tire pressure, smoke coming from under the hood, etc.) your first reaction is usually to turn down the stereo? What you are doing is eliminating distractions in order to help you determine what is happening. By minimizing competing input, you can narrow down the problem more quickly.

Be observant on your trawler. Keep track of what is standard and record the norms. Don't forget that big problems usually start small, so look for a shift in the little details and you will stand a better chance of realizing when a change has occurred and its potential effect on the big picture. Your boat is always speaking to you — are you listening?

Keeping your trawler ship-shape builds pride of ownership and provides you with one more sense you can enjoy: a sense of accomplishment. ■

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