

STAYING FIT ABOARD



by Jeff Stives

Someone we know once asked if we “worked out” on the boat. Pretty funny question. “Sure,” said Christine, my partner. “I spend at least an hour in the weight salon and another half-hour or so on the machines in the forward cabin.”

“On a 40-foot boat?” the curious one asked, amazed.

“Oh sure,” said Chris. “And then I soak in the sauna and hot tub.”

That last remark did it. The questioner knew she was being had and moved on to another topic. But staying in shape on a small vessel isn’t easy. While you might have a few small dumbbells to heft now and then, any other fitness equipment probably isn’t coming aboard. So how do people like us stay fit and trim?

Well, first of all, we’re not all that trim. Like most Americans, we’re carrying some extra meat just in case we get shipwrecked and have to starve for a few months. We are not obese, but we are a bit overweight and not proud of it. However, there is a limit to how much blubber one can lift over the rail and into a dinghy or onto a finger pier while the boat is rocking and the wind is up. So maybe that’s the controlling factor. If we took down the lifelines and put out a set of stairs, we’d probably pack on a few more pounds.

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Wondering about the apparent fitness of other boaters, we did some checking, conducted a totally unscientific survey, and came up with some interesting figures (so to speak). Of the liveaboards we know, very few are actually obese; most are pretty fit-looking folks. We surveyed 23 people:

All except two were couples.

Age: mostly late 40s to mid 60s.

Weight: within 10-15 percent of normal for body frame.

Boat size: 30-40 feet.

Power or sail: About 50-50.

Do they do a formal workout? No.

So, why are boaters and sailors generally fit, or at least fit-looking?

At the top of the list is the fact that many are living on a mooring or at an

chor, at least part of the year. This means that they get enforced exercise just getting ashore: rowing, climbing on and off the boat, handling lines, jumping to and from docks, and hauling groceries and gear about. The lifestyle in itself is one of exercise.

Second, they do a lot of walking. While many liveaboards have vehicles ashore, they tend to walk much more, and for legitimate reasons. For example, almost everyone we talked with has one or two dogs. They take their dogs ashore and for a walk several times in 24 hours, rain or shine. They walk to restaurants, shops and showers.

Third, boaters probably do more heavy transport and lifting than their shore-bound counterparts. They carry sails, outboard motors, fuel, batteries and backpacks. They pull dock carts. All of this is part of the life, not an exercise regime.

Fourth, being aboard, they tend to do work that others never encounter. Just starting a recalcitrant outboard in a roaring squall gets the muscles working as much or more than sitting on a machine full of weights and springs.

Sailboat residents seem to have a definite edge over power boaters in this regard. By virtue of the onboard conveniences, power boat owners seem to be more overweight and do less daily on-board or ashore exercise. (If I’m wrong,

powerboaters, fire away! I'd love to hear from you.) It also seemed true that those who began living aboard and were overweight (1) stayed that way and (2) were on a large power vessel. One candid owner said simply: "If I'd wanted to sweat, I'd have gotten a sailboat." Conveniences like davits for dinghies, boarding stairs and ramps, larger, less cramped engine rooms, and work areas on larger power yachts may call for less "grunt work." How much this influences actual fitness is probably moot.

Then there's the diet. We found this interesting in our limited research. Most of those we talked to said their diet was no different aboard than ashore. Those on larger boats said that they ate out more, but if they cooked aboard, it was more complex meals. This seems to be a factor of having larger cold storage and cooking appliances, as well as larger generator sets. Our international cruising friends said the same. Typical were the comments of Randy and Eileen Beyer, who e-mailed us as they were en route from Aruba to Venezuela in November. Randy wrote:

"No change in weight. The menus vary only when we run out of fresh vegetables. Grilled chicken or grilled fish salad in the evening has become a staple for us. No problem getting lettuce and tomatoes, and they will keep long enough to make short passages. We are particularly pleased with the packaged milk (local), butter (Irish), and vegetables (Dutch) that require no refrigeration. I think we eat better at sea than on shore, because there is no temptation to go to a restaurant and stuff yourself with heavy meats and sauces. At sea, there is enough movement of the boat to give us a 24-hour isometric workout. We usually walk a couple of miles every morning when we are in port."

Some crews said they lost weight while cruising, and others said they ate more and gained weight. Nothing conclusive there.

Of our 23 respondents, about 22 percent said they were overweight. About 10 percent said they were on a diet and stuck to it. While only 5 percent actually went to a workout one or more days a week, 20 percent said they had a

"routine" they followed, whether it was walking or rowing or kayaking.

More than one respondent said that they thought the key to better fitness aboard was that their lifestyle was centered on an outdoor sport, that boating was part of their life, and they were immersed in it every day of the year.

If there are any conclusions to be drawn from this unscientific data, they might be the following:

Living aboard provides a natural incentive to get more exercise than you might living ashore.

There is a high likelihood that live-aboards will perform physical work more often as part of their daily lifestyle, often out of necessity.

The larger the vessel, the less exercise, especially if it is a powerboat.

Staying fit is not, apparently, a factor of where you live, but rather what you do in your life.

Epilogue

After all this discussion of fitness, Christine and I got to thinking that maybe it was time for us to get in shape. We do this every 10 years or so, but this time we were serious. So we went to talk to a guy on the north dock who looks very fit but never seems to work at it. To preserve his lifestyle and reputation, we'll call him Doctor Tank (that's Phillip D. Tank).

Dr. Tank noted that just doing everyday chores aboard can be very effective in keeping fit. He shared these thoughts with us and we went back to *Laphroaig* and worked up the following list of things to do that will help us stay in shape:

Every day (or at least four times a week)

1. Pull up anchor without using mechanical means (no windlass).
2. Change sails — all of them.
3. Clean bird stuff off of bimini.
4. Throw rocks at birds.
5. Pick up stones on deck.
6. Pick up bird parts from deck.
7. Wash deck.
8. Lift 75-pound golden retriever from dinghy to deck (three times a day).

Weekly

1. Scrub teak deck.
2. Clean waterline from dinghy; or clean waterline from dock; or clean waterline from deck (yikes!).
3. Climb mast and fix broken wind-direction gear that large gull sat on.
4. Explore hidden areas in cabin, removing dog hair and tumbleweeds.
5. Launch dinghy over rail.
6. Lift outboard from rail to dinghy.
7. Pull starting cord on outboard at least 50 times.
8. Row ashore.
9. Buy, carry aboard, and store 40 pounds of groceries.
10. Load, refill and unload six 5-gallon water jugs from dinghy to deck.
11. Haul dinghy back on deck.
12. Lift outboard(s) to stern rail.
13. Don scuba gear.
14. Dive for outboard.

Every six months

15. Remove batteries, clean, refill, and put back in place (do this twice before you find out that batteries are shot).
16. Change out batteries.
17. Change engine oil (by hand — no motorized pumps).
18. Do laundry, even if you don't think it's time.
19. Take 25 pounds of quarters ashore.
20. Clean powdered laundry detergent out of dinghy bilge.
21. Carry 15 pounds of dry laundry back to dock in the rain.
22. Take 30 pounds of wet clothes back to laundry for re-drying.
23. Take sails ashore and wash, scrub, dry, and fold.
24. Refold sails to get them into sail bags.

Dr. Tank also suggests carrying 20 to 30 pounds of ice from dock to dinghy and then aboard. He notes that if the weather is warm, you can cut the weight by waiting an hour after buying the ice. The weight will be less.

This has got to help us stay fit.

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