

# Where is the Finish?



MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ON THE SUBJECT OF PAINT LATELY, AND RIGHTLY so. During the 'boom' years there were many reasons for paint being such a hot topic. Extreme pressure on production often allowed insufficient time for paint contractors to do a proper job. In addition, many paint contractors had to hire unskilled workers to cope with the growing demand, which is another reason why so many new builds suffered from major paint warranty issues.

In the course of this growth in demand, many basic application skills and proven traditional methods have been forgotten or replaced by faster (but not necessarily better) methods. The ensuing conflicts between yards and owners about paint quality were often settled with discounts and free repaints in order to free up the slot for the next project. As the demand for qualitative, quantifiable standards grew, so too did the number of surveyors and inspectors employed to check on the process and the resulting quality. The yards, however, remain the key players in this field and if a yard is not committed the chances of an improvement are negligible regardless of which standards are applied or the efforts of an owner's surveyor.

Some yards reviewed the situation and came to the conclusion that the cost of paint issues was staggering and causing them a loss of reputation. These yards decided to invest in infrastructure and improved conditions, combined with proper management of paint matters at the right level in the organisation. In addition to tremendous cost savings on paint costs during the process, these yards managed to achieve their ultimate goal: delivering yachts without paint issues. However, yards that fail to actively manage their paint sub-contractor and/or invest in their organisation and infrastructure still run the risk that every new build delivery will be accompanied by disputes over paint.

A major development in 2008 forced many yards to take a close look at the fairing and painting process. For good reasons, the leading paint manufacturer reformulated its topcoat. This new formulation displayed undesirable surface effects on several projects, presumably caused by a higher sensitivity to minor contaminations on the surface. When combined with the shortfall in preparation mentioned above, this led to quite a few situations involving surface

defects. It also confirmed our earlier conclusions that better management and control of the cleaning, preparation and application process is urgently required.

It would be too overly optimistic to suggest that problems with paint can be avoided altogether. After all, paint is a semi-finished material that needs to be applied by human beings under difficult conditions. Nonetheless, it is essential that the lesson is learned that the basics in paint technology and paint application cannot be ignored.

In this respect, I am convinced that the yards and the industry in general would benefit from a thorough review of all painting processes under the credo 'back to basics'. While such a review might initially result in higher costs, the overall balance will be positive. At the same time I am aware that any

renaissance of basic skills and practices is threatened by the current financial crisis. This has caused several cancellations and withdrawals from the new build market and other yachts have been put up for sale. This is having a negative effect on the price level of new projects. Inevitably, this downward spiral is starting to trickle down to the paint contractors' level (as we are currently observing) and this may have a serious impact on any efforts to improve quality by going back to basics.

The next few months will tell us which way we are going. One thing is sure, however, there is never a dull moment in the paint industry, as we will definitely be faced with further developments for reasons of safety and ecological aspects. The question remains...Where is the finish?

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