

PG's tips

In his usual technical-ish column, Paul Garland looks at winter cruising

It is lovely to see a few hardy boaters still enjoying the Shannon and I hope they are rewarded with uncrowded harbours and locks. I know some will throw another sod of turf on the fire and read a good book. Others will strive to get more channels on satellite to the plasma TV, hope that the inverter will keep up while warm air is wafted through the cabins, wishing for more Wi Fi Marinas.

It is easy to buy Christmas prezzies for gadget heads as each year sees last year's state of the art thingy superseded tenfold with the Mk 2. What would you like to buy the boat for Christmas? The boat would probably want to winter in a nice heated shed, blankets and all. The owner should look at the season past and see if there is anything missing or not up to the job.

If you are happy that the boat is well found then start into a realm of what if! So, what if the engine stops in Lough Ree in force 6? Have I enough anchor chain to hold? Have I tools to fix the problem? Have I skills enough to fix the problem? Can I get out a call for help? Have I enough strong line for a tow? Continue this what if scenario throughout the boat. Fire extinguishers, security of items, spares held. There are big lakes and bad weather out there, so be confident that if you are caught out

then you are not caught out if you get my drift.

Recent talk on the chat line woke me up to dehumidifiers and their use. It would appear that my efforts to use the night rate in the marina were less than useless. I had, in fact, installed an ice maker, as this is all you can expect from any dehumidifier running at less than 5°C. A quick adjustment before anyone noticed had it running from mid day till five in the evening to get the advantage of any heat. Now all that runs in the wee small hours is a small bilge heater which only comes on at less than 5°C. This, I hope, will keep the raw water and domestic cylinder above freezing.

I leave all taps including the shower open to allow for expansion by frost. I am not a fan of trickle charging lead acid batteries as they are designed to discharge and recharge. If you are going to run the boat once a month or so during the winter this is enough. I also believe that bringing the batteries home in the winter is a waste of time as you will disturb more cells than if you leave them alone.

Starting the boat in the depths of winter requires even more caution than normal as there are more hazards and less people about. Put on the lifejacket as you get out of the car. Let people know where you are going, take extra care on jetties and when getting aboard.

If the engine has a preheat then give twice the normal time – 30 seconds is about right for a Perkins or a BMC. Let it idle for three or four minutes before untying. There is a real danger of falling in. Take the ropes back aboard and try to work from the deck. When underway allow the engine to warm before applying power. This is especially important in engines with turbochargers as they need warm thin oil.

The lock keepers are on winter time and many days pass with no boat movements so you are well advised to phone ahead. You must take winter levels and flow into consideration, especially when approaching bridges and moorings. It is usual to have a three or four knot flow after heavy rains and obviously water in the narrow sections runs faster than that on the lakes.

Rules are relaxed in the winter and Waterways Ireland will allow long-term mooring on public jetties for a small charge. It is a very different Shannon in the winter, so get out and try it. Your boat may prefer a heated shed but you can always promise her a polish in the spring in exchange for her shivering her timbers/rivets/glass all winter. So whether you use ipod or a sod to keep your winter short, keep boating. ■

Paul Garland is Vice-President of the IWAI, email: vpresident@iwai.ie.



Paul Garland