

Whitlock Gear/Throttle Lever Seal

When we received our Bavaria 36, I was surprised how poor the seal was between the throttle/gear lever and the binnacle. It was made from sponge rubber and appeared to have little UV protection. After a few months it fell off (see photo). I didn't bother too much until the Gins Farm rally when the owner of a Bavaria 36, a little older than ours, reported that his push button to disengage the throttle from the gear had seized. I therefore discussed this with Opal but by then the boat was out of the initial warranty and anyway the only solution proposed by Russell Asser was to remove the control and replace it with the same! At the Southampton Boat Show he had even shown me new boats on which the seals were already disintegrating. One was a Bavaria 38!! As winter approaches, I didn't want to leave the shaft unprotected and suffer a seized disengage button. The following is, I think, a good, cheap, quick but possibly temporary solution.

I took a piece of car inner tube which could be obtained from any tyre dealer as scrap. I marked out two concentric circles of 60 mm and 20 mm diameter. I then cut out the two circles with scissors leaving a rubber washer as can be seen in the picture. I then cut the washer on a radial line on one side. Using the emery from a cycle repair kit, the inside of one end and the outside of the other were buffed. A thin smear of the rubber cement was then applied to the buffed ends and using the split, the washer was placed over the shaft (see photo). The ends were pulled over one another and held together for a few seconds to allow the joint to bond and the rubber washer to become something like the form of a truncated cone (photo). Where the joint is made there is a step which prevents a perfect seal. However, if the seal is now rotated so that the joint is vertically downwards when the lever is in neutral, there should be no problem with water ingress. The seal should grip on the shaft forming a fixed seal and slide with slight pressure on the binnacle, as the lever is rotated, forming a sliding seal. It is probably as well to lubricate the shaft with waterproof grease before fitting the seal. The seal colour is black but looks OK because it matches the black push button and stop lever. This should suffice until Opal or Volvo come up with a "proper" solution.

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