

Step-by-step servicing of a Blakes seacock

Servicing a seacock should be straightforward enough, but as Richard Hare discovered they're sometimes jammed solid and require some creative effort to free up

Blakes seacocks need servicing periodically. Sooner or later they seize and the realisation of this can sometimes come to our attention within minutes of being plonked back in the water at the beginning of the season. Very inconvenient...

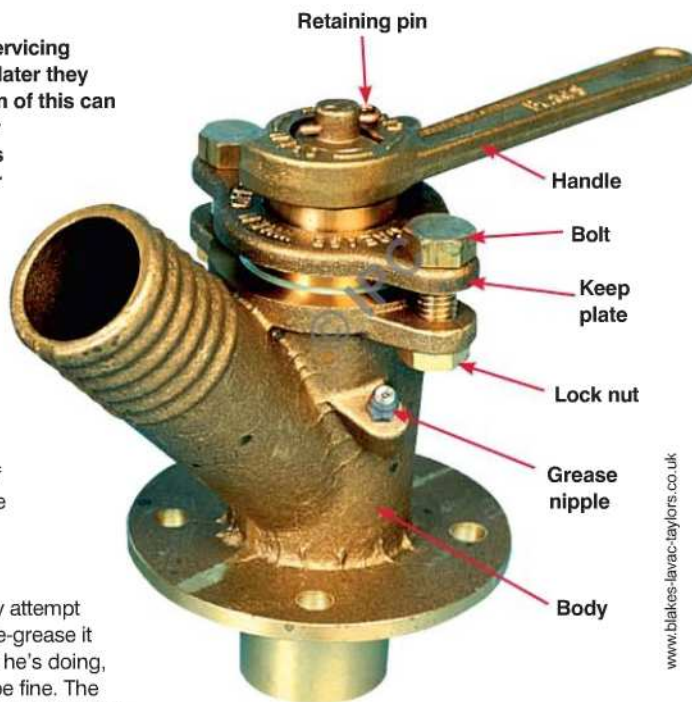
Alas this isn't a problem we can fix permanently while we're in the water, although tapping the handle with a hammer may be sufficient to release it. Usually, once moved, seawater finds a way in and lubricates the interface between the cylinder and body and this can see us through to the end of the season, provided we exercise the cylinder regularly.

Re-greasing

If that doesn't work a brave man may attempt removing the cylinder to clean and re-grease it between tides, and if he knows what he's doing, and what he's up against, it should be fine. The wise man will keep a wooden plug to hand though, just in case.

The real answer is to check that the lever moves before we crane our pride and joy back into old briny. And it would make perfect sense to give them a routine service each year – but this isn't likely, is it? We're all flawed.

The Blakes Popular Plus seacock comes with a grease nipple that enables us to squirt grease into it



www.blakes-lavac-tayloris.co.uk



1 The Blakes seacock can be seen in the foreground. The junction with the black hose is where the holding tank and toilet outlets converge. Two hose clips are put on all connections, with tightening screws on opposite sides



6 With both bolts removed, I lifted the keep plate from the body. At this stage it may in some cases be possible to lift the cylinder out from above, but...



10 So that I didn't lose anything, I put the pieces into a bucket, along with some diesel which is ideal for cleaning and easing

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Richard Hare grew up in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, where he learned to sail. He has since moved up the coast to Woodbridge, Suffolk, where he fitted out his Golden Hind 31,

Keppel. She has cruised the Med as far as the Aegean and is now in the Gironde estuary, western France

periodically without having to take the whole thing apart, thereby significantly extending the full maintenance period. But if your boat has the basic version, without a grease nipple, or if the nipple is hard to get the grease-gun onto (as was the case with mine until I bought a flexible greaser arm from a motor factor) there's little alternative other than to dismantle it and do a thorough service.

Preventing weeping

In my own case, a tiny weep had developed. My instinct was to tighten down the keep plate, which I did, but on doing so the seacock handle became immovable, locked solid.

Nothing would budge it, not even when I slackened the bolts again. It was stuck. Annoyingly, I hadn't managed to staunch the leak and only made matters worse. But as it was close to lift out time I kept an eye on it and let it weep until I had Keppel safely up on the hardstanding.



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With the outlet hose removed, primarily to aid access to the locking nuts below, the underside and lock nut situation was revealed by using a small mirror (see arrow above)



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The keep plate can be unbolted without removing the handle, but access is greatly improved by doing so. It's very easy. The pin on the top holds the handle in place on the cylinder...



4

... so I removed it with pliers. The handle then lifted off easily. I now had maximum access to the locking nuts although, as can be seen here, the right-hand one is already loosened



5

I removed the left-hand locknut with a spanner. The locknuts are there for extra security – the bolts actually tighten the keep plate by being threaded through the flange on the seacock body



7

... more likely it will be stiff and teasing it out from above may cause damage. It was better to nip down the ladder and tap it up and out from below using a piece of wood that fits the hole



8

The cylinder popped out easily and, hey presto, daylight. No need to explain why this manoeuvre should never be undertaken while under way!



9

The four main removable components of the assembly: handle, cylinder, keep plate, nuts and bolts



11

The Popular Plus body has a grease groove machined into it. The grease nipple feeds a horizontal channel that, in turn, feeds into the vertical one shown. When regreasing take care to recharge these channels



12

Blakes suggest the seacock should be cleaned by turning the plug inside the body with grinding paste, before removing it and cleaning both parts with white spirit. I didn't have any grinding paste so compromised by polishing the plug gently with 400 grit abrasive paper, lubricated with diesel. I then smeared the cylinder and the inside of the body with grease



13

Now cleaned and greased, I eased the cylinder back into the body. Note that the arrow at the top of the cylinder must point to the outlet before the handle is replaced. I could then replace the keep plate and finger tighten the bolts evenly, sufficient to allow the cylinder to be turned easily without squeezing out the grease. Care is needed here as it doesn't take much to over-tighten the keep plate and make the cylinder go solid. Finally, with the bolts restrained with a spanner to prevent them from moving, I replaced the lock nuts and drew them up snugly