



Chesapeake Tartan 30 Association

MAST STUFFING*

Q: I was planning to install internal halyards but, when I removed the masthead, found the entire mast stuffed with styrofoam. Have you had experience removing this stuff? Mike Dahill, *Undine*, #97

A: I think your problem originates from the annoyance caused by loose electrical wires and VHF radio coax slapping around inside the mast when anchored. It drove some people (including us) crazy. It was impossible to sleep. As far as I know, T-30s always had such loose wires inside the mast when delivered. If anything was done about it, it was done by boatyards or by owners themselves.

A number of approaches have been tried. One in particular we witnessed was on a Morgan 34. We watched her skipper being hauled to the top of the mast, carrying a bag full of those styrofoam peanuts frequently used for packaging fragile objects. For hours he inserted peanuts, one by one, into a little hole under his main halyard sheave, until the whole mast was full. Clearly, this guy had plenty of time on his hands, and didn't want to have the mast pulled to fix the noise. It worked, insofar as silencing the racket was concerned. But we always wondered how it turned out in the long run.

A more common solution back in the '70s-'80s was to pull the mast out of the boat and then, using a long pole, shove pieces of solid styrofoam up inside to secure the wires. Typically four or five chunks of styrofoam were used, spaced out over the length of the mast. This works, too, to quiet the noise. The problem comes when the owner wants to add another wire, or (as in your case) halyards inside the mast. The stuff has to come out. How to do it? I don't know. If I had the problem, I'd go talk to my favorite boatyard to see what they would do. Left to my own devices, I guess I'd have the mast pulled, then try one of those plumber's gadgets that are used to ream crud out of a drainpipe, but I'm sure that any such tool strong enough to ream styrofoam out would destroy any wiring in the process. So after the foam is cleared out, I'd have to rewire the mast — which really isn't all that much bother, with the mast laying on its side.

I never heard of anyone completely filling the mast with styrofoam, but I suppose anything is possible. More likely, you will find that there are several discrete chunks of foam in the mast, but they may be stuck in there pretty hard, if they've been there long.

On my boat, when the slap of wires inside the mast became unbearable, we had the yard pull the mast to fix it. They laid the mast on sawhorses with its normally forward side down. They disconnected and pulled out the wires, at the same time pulling messenger cords to make replacement easier. A piece of one-inch semi-rigid PVC pipe was cut to length, and the messengers threaded through it as required. Then the pipe was inserted into the mast, where it fell along the bottom (i.e., forward) part of the mast. From underneath, the mast was carefully drilled every few feet and pop rivets were used to secure the pipe in place. The messengers were then used to pull the wires back, and they were reconnected. The pipe has worked beautifully for about 20 years to keep the wires silent, and there is room (plus a messenger left in place) to pull any more wires I might need. Brad Armendt, *Emprise*, #282

Another Answer: I had a similar problem inside my mast. When I went to rewire it, I found it full of foam. Not the hard type, but soft. In fact, so soft it had turned into a semi-goo! Awful mess. What I did was to remove the top of the mast and all the wiring. Then took an old forestay and pushed it down the middle. I made some meat hooks on another piece of wire and pulled it through the mast. It took a couple of times to get it loose. Next, a hose with liberal amounts of water finished the job. I replaced some bad wiring, then inserted the bundle back into the mast, wrapped in ½ inch water pipe insulation. This is the type that is black and one side is slit. Every few feet I taped it and used some large plastic wire ties with the ends left on to keep the whole mess in the center of the mast. It has worked great all last summer. One problem that I did have: the foam would get caught on various screws in the mast. When this happened, I would try to figure out where it was stuck, and remove that (those) screws. Usually got the right one the first or second try. Carl Dow, *Nauta*, #82

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