

## ‘Preventive maintenance’ critical in the great outdoors



A lack of preventive maintenance on my part once cost me a tournament and 10 grand. This tarpon escaped because of frozen drags on a reel. (Photo/Capt. Chris Barron)

I have a friend in Florida who could be a poster child for what not to be, in terms of preventive maintenance. The area we lived received over 50 inches of rain a year and had humidity so thick that fish could swim in the air.

My friend bought a Cadillac Sedan De Ville. I would not necessarily say the car was old, but it probably was left over from the Lewis and Clark expedition. My friend did nothing to maintain the car; he just drove it and put gas in it, and left it out in the elements.

Occasionally he would check the oil, finding it down several quarts, he would fill it back up. He never bothered to change the oil, belts, spark plugs, or anything else that would qualify as “preventive maintenance,” even though I prodded him endlessly about it. This car was one of those vehicles where you wiped your feet off, after you got out.

One day I was driving to work, and saw my buddies’ beast in the center lane, blocking traffic. The car had obviously died, probably of natural causes. The car got the last word,



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

causing my friend much stress and embarrassment by croaking in the center lane of a busy thoroughfare at rush hour, with angry drivers all around giving obscene gestures and calling him names. I doubt my friend got the message.

Preventive maintenance, or PM for short, in the outdoor world will not only save potential embarrassment, but could also save lives. In the sporting portion of the outdoors, the area where I spend most of my time, it could mean the difference between success or being the agonized loser on the Wide World of Sports.

Rather than deliver a sermon about everything that needs PM, I thought it would be more of an impact if I cited some examples from my personal library of “things that went

wrong.” My friend and constant companion, Mr. Murphy, the founder of Murphy’s Law, claims that all failures due to forgotten PM are of his own invention, and I believe him.

Generally speaking, my world revolves around hunting and fishing, with a great deal of time spent boating. In the saltwater environment of the Florida Keys, skipping out on some PM will reward you with a disaster in short order. Take fishing reels as an example.

A quality fishing reel is an expensive precision instrument, and full of moving parts and bearings that need cleaned of all saltwater residue and lubricated after each use. The drags, that control the speed and smoothness a large fish takes out line during a fight, are especially important.

I was fishing a three-day tournament in Islamorada for tarpon. At the end of day two, we were in first place by a few inches.

We hit the docks in the evening after a hot day on the water. I did not clean up my reels, figuring one more day would not matter, so much for my future

as a fortuneteller.

Next morning, I hooked into a 170-pound tarpon on a lure. This boy was bigger than anything caught in the tournament, and was a lock on my win and the 10 grand prize money. As I was dreaming about how I was going to spend the prize money, the big fish went on a mayday run for deeper water.

The drag on my 12-pound test outfit was screaming as the tarpon ran, for a while anyway. The drag washers heated up and froze in place, causing the line to snap and the big fish waved goodbye with his tail. Of course, if I had taken the time to clean up those drags ...

In the world of fishing, I can cite you hundreds of examples of things I knew were broken, or near failure, that I should have taken care of. Instead, I put off the PM for another day, because of lack of time or just plain laziness, only to pay a price next time out.

The same can be said about anything we do outdoors. If you own an RV, you could write a book about PM, citing examples of what happened when you put it off. RVs are

full of equipment, from generators, refrigerators, and furnaces, to water lines and electrical boxes and circuits, all begging for attention. Forget to take care of one and you will be reminded on your next trip.

Hikers, campers and backpackers all have a select set of gear. This gear must be cleaned, dried and maintained on a regular basis, assuming you want it to work the next time you head out. I wish I had patched up the leak in the tent when I got home, instead of putting it off. Of course, I forgot about it; until next camping trip when it started to rain.

Speaking of rain and the hole in the tent, my sleeping bag got soaked that night. When I packed up to head home, I rolled up the bag, intending on drying it out when I got home. Of course, it was late when I arrived, and tomorrow sounded pretty good. Yes, I forgot, until the next camping trip when I spent two nights in a wet-dog-smelling, mildew-lined sleeping bag.

Perhaps part of my problem is procrastination. Rather than doing chores

and work on my gear, I would rather be outside using the gear hunting and fishing. Still and all, I should pay more attention to keeping my equipment in top shape.

The above are merely a few of the many times I have had problems with equipment. As an older man looking back, I now allow time for the frequent visits of Mr. Murphy. Were the very nature of our outdoor life not such that some blasted thing is always breaking down, going wrong or getting sick, it would be a perfect lifestyle. But, so effective is Murphy that the majority of effort must be spent on just preventive maintenance.

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