



The Atalanta has now reached an age at which insurance companies generally need a report before renewal of cover at a period which is usually around five years. There may also be a number of you who are contemplating buying an Atalanta and the most important advice I can give to those about to purchase is "do not buy without obtaining a full condition survey". You will not be able to insure the boat on change of ownership without such a report. However knowledgeable the individual may be, a qualified surveyor who can come along and give a totally dispassionate report is likely to detect problems which even the current owner doesn't know exist. Additionally you will be able to use a report as a negotiating factor to reduce the price in line with any defects found or to have the repairs carried out as necessary to the account of the current owner.

Unfortunately, anyone can call themselves a surveyor and it is therefore necessary to make quite sure that your Insurance company will accept a report from the surveyor you intend to commission. If you are in any doubt as to who to use, I suggest that you contact the Yacht Brokers, Designers and Surveyors Association at Liphook in Hampshire who will provide you with a list of their surveyors who will be acceptable to Insurance companies. You will have the additional safeguard in using the YBDSA surveyor in knowing that the surveyor is himself insured. Surveyors too are human, and not all are as good as each other, but at least you are sure that the YBDSA surveyor has been vetted by someone else.

Make sure before you commission a survey that you have discussed the matter in detail with the surveyor on the telephone or face to face so that you are aware of his requirements for opening the vessel and what he is able to tell you about and, more importantly, what he is not able to tell you about. Also make sure that you obtain a written contract from him. Any surveyor worth his salt will send you his standard contract for you to sign before the survey is commenced. In this way he will know that he is going to be paid and you will know that he is going to do the job and there will be a fixed price agreed for the work before he starts.

Survey of Atalantas is somewhat specialised because of their type of construction and, unfortunately, many insurance companies will classify an Atalanta in the same way as they would a sheet plywood boat. Some items are difficult to inspect and the more that the vessel is opened up for inspection the more detailed the surveyor's report can be. The main backbone of the boat does not take the form of a normal keel, keelson and hog. The small section of the keel which can be seen outside the boat is little more than a non structural runner. Unfortunately, when the boats were built, many of them had a gap left between the top of the runner and the underside of the hull and that tends to form a rot trap. It is always worthwhile periodically to take a test drilling to ascertain that you do not have rot between the two surfaces because by the time you observe the rot externally a lot of damage has been done. The runner is quite simple to strip off and on my own boat, Baby Seal, I renewed it all in a little more than a day.

The keel boxes, of course, and centreboard cases on all boats in general are also rot traps, but unfortunately on normal surveys without removal of the keels this is almost impossible to assess. It becomes first evident round the keel bolt removal holes in the fore cabin and if you have any evidence of weeping or soft plywood in that area then it is very important to deal with it quickly. It is possible to cut sections out and insert sections. Very difficult however to give specific advice on how to deal with an individual problem without seeing it, but repairs in the immediate vicinity of the pins is not quite so frightening as you may think. If the screws for the covers of the keelbolt apertures will not bite then it is long past time to be doing something about it.



The keel lifting gear is, of course, an engineer's nightmare. To survey the equipment fully requires removal of the keels. In general, a surveyor will be forced to say that he can make no comment on the condition of the pins or the bottom end of the yokes. However good you are with a mirror, on an Atalanta it is almost impossible to see and the surveyor will normally exclude them. I have yet to hear of an insurance company that insists on them being removed although it is quite common with a normal ballasted keel boat for the company to insist on a periodic removal of a bolt. Not too difficult a job on an Atalanta to remove a bolt, one at a time, but normally it would be beyond the scope of the type of survey that we are talking about.

In general the hulls and decks of Atalantas with which I have been involved have been in very good condition. Some delamination was beginning to occur on one or two decks. It is possible to resin inject using epoxy resins and pin back into place if the delamination is only slight. If necessary the outer layer can be stripped off and rebuilt. Like any diagonal hull the outer repairs are easy, the inner ones are something of a nightmare.

Atalantas tend to suffer from electrolytic problems around the fastenings, where brass fastenings have been used. By now I think it is safe to say that all brass fastenings fitted originally on all Atalantas will need replacement. They dezincify, the zinc leaches out of the brass just leaving a copper honeycomb together with the familiar white ring around the screws where the cellulose of the wood breaks down. Again, if you are going to replace the fitting it is possible to resin soak with epoxy (not cellulose) resin in the immediate vicinity of the fastening and replace the cellulose of the wood with epoxy resin.

The surveyor will take particular note of the rudders; particularly the pintles and the rudder blades in way of the pivot pins. There were several types of Atalanta rudders, three I believe, and the aluminium sheet tended to crack and break off in way of the pivot pin or just below the pivot. If I had kept Baby Seal, I think that I would have replaced my aluminium blade with a wooden one. Rambler of Seaview A52 has a wooden blade and, as far as I am aware, this has been completely successful. (The plywood Blade of A52 is 3/4 in thick, HON SEC).

The surveyor will take a close note of the chain plates and will almost certainly ask for a sample bolt to be removed. These are simply cut squares and it is only a few minutes job to remove a bolt, but it does do some damage to your paintwork.

Masts tend to go rotten at the heel behind the heel fitting. But, again, having had this happen to me, it looks bad before it becomes structurally unsound and it is not too difficult to scarf or tenon a short length into the foot of the mast.

Under normal circumstances standing running rigging is simply a visual examination and the running of a gloved hand over the standing rigging to make sure that nothing is stranded. If anyone wants to verify this for themselves they should make quite sure that they are wearing gloves because it is a fine way of cutting fingers.

The sails themselves, for insurance purposes, only really require a cursory examination to establish that they are in fact serviceable and not rotten or blown out. The insurance company is not too worried about whether they are baggy or stretched, merely whether they will in fact drive the boat in the manner to which she is accustomed. It will make a considerable difference to the value of your boat if the vessel has a full new suit of sails, but that is something which you should discuss with your surveyor. If there is not a sail loft, then the survey of sails is in any event very difficult. If necessary, the surveyor will simply open them out of the bags inside the boat and report that it was just a cursory inspection.



The surveyor will be extremely keen on your gas installation. In general Atalantas are very good as they were built with a gas tight gas locker with an overboard drain. Make sure that all piping is seamless copper for as much as possible with all flexible section of recently dated BS 3212 pipe. Also make sure before the surveyor appears that the cooker does not trap or stretch the flexible piping as it swings on its gimbals.

The surveyor will make a brief examination of electrical equipment to ensure that adequate sizes of cable are used. He will take a very dim view of open block connectors as these soon rust and lead to leakage currents and points of high resistance. These are easy to make watertight and there is no reason why you should not use them. They can be sealed with silicon sealant and wrapped in self amalgamating tape but that presents something of a problem if you want to disconnect. I use a small plastic workbox obtainable from the local electrician or CB shops. Put the connector inside that and stuff it full of plasticene before putting the lid on. It is rather a crude idea but entirely effective.

The surveyor may switch on and test all your electrical items, or he may not, but he will certainly check your navigation lights. The original navigation lights do not comply with Annex 1 of the Prevention of Collision Rules 1977 and you should be aware that if you have a collision at night - or any other incident at night for that matter - and your navigation lights do not comply - in other words they do not have a certificate - then your insurance company will not cover you whether it was your fault or not. Basically any light manufactured before about 1972 does not comply.

The surveyor will examine your fire appliances to make sure that your extinguishers are in date. They will require either a label certifying that they have been examined and test weighed or the simple powder extinguishers such as the FireMasters have a six year life with the date of manufacture and the date of expiry printed on the back. Any fire extinguisher of less than 3lbs, ie 1.36 kgms is really of little use. They simply do not operate for long enough to enable you to attack a fire with any hope of success. A fire blanket in the galley is money well spent and, in my opinion it is long past time that insurance companies made it mandatory. They are in fact much more use than an extinguisher.

The surveyor will also want to see your bilge pumps tested for operation. Also make sure that the vessel is provided with an adequate flare pack in date. Again the expiry date is marked on the pack which has a service life of three years.

From this you will gather that surveying an Atalanta, or any boat of similar construction and size, is a time consuming affair and you should expect the surveyor to spend around about 5 hours actually working on the boat. If he does not then the job has not been done properly. As a result you should get a report which will be in the region of 2000 words and again a short summary report is not really satisfactory.

In case all this sounds like gloom and despondency, rest assured that your Atalanta is one of the best constructed 26ft boats around. With normal care and maintenance they are only in the early stages of their lives and at least none of you will get Osmosis.

Though written in 1989 the comments and advice given still applies today. HON SEC.