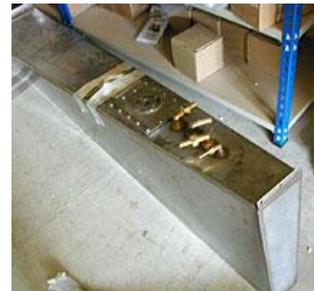




CONTESSA 32 CLASS ASSOCIATION TECHNICAL PAPER

CONTESSA 32 HEALTH CHECK



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DOCUMENT INFORMATION

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OVERVIEW

The first Contessa 32 was built by Jeremy Rogers in 1971 and since then many hundreds have been built in the UK and are still being built today. While the design has largely remained unchanged there have been some minor revisions and variations over that time. Because they are so cherished by their owners, many boats have been refurbished over the years to bring them up to date.

Most Co32s on the water today were built in the 1970s and early 1980s and while they are a testament to the original high-quality build, any boat of a certain age will have problems that require attention. The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the known problems and items to check on a Contessa 32, many of these issues will be common to any boat of the same era but are included for completeness.

It is not intended that this paper will provide the readers with complete information on how to carry out a thorough survey of a Co32, for this we recommend a qualified marine surveyor. The Contessa 32 Class Association accepts no liability for items missed from this paper however if there are items that you feel should be included please contact the author.

This paper relates to boats built in the UK by Jeremy Rogers Yachts however many of the points below will also be valid for the Contessa 32's built by J.J. Taylor in Canada.

ITEMS TO CHECK – ON DECK

- Check condition of pulpit and pushpit as these are vulnerable to damage, especially if the boat has been raced. It is not uncommon for the pulpit to be pushed up and back from an impact that can result in slack guardrails.
- Check for stress marks and cracking around base of pulpit, pushpit and stanchion as a result of impact damage. The fixing bolts can be a source of leaks if not re-sealed with a suitable modern sealant.
- Check for stress cracking around base of shrouds. The shroud chain plates are also a source of leaks if not re-sealed with modern sealant. On some boats the lower shroud backing plates have been enlarged to spread the load on the deck.
- Check the condition of the shroud and forestay U bolts, it is worth replacing if more than 25 years old. If in doubt remove, check condition and refit with a suitable sealant. Lower shroud U bolts were originally straight but replacements from Jeremy Rogers Ltd are now supplied angled.
- Check condition of genoa car track as the aluminum track held down with stainless steel bolts can corrode over time and may require replacement.
- Inspect the mast for corrosion, especially around stainless steel fittings such as those for the jockey pole that are 12"-18" above deck on each side.
- Check the condition of windows, the aluminum frames can corrode over time and the seals break down. If the windows are originals from the 1970s then the sealant is likely to be hard and ineffective.

- Check condition of teak toerails and taffrail as these can be damaged as a result of impact. The toerail covers the hull to deck join where some boats have experienced leaks.
- Check the condition of the boom traveler, the original IYE traveler arrangement may require some attention to run freely. Many have been replaced with a Harken or similar low-friction system.
- Check the condition of the laminated tiller. Look particularly for any delimitation or rot near base of tiller.
- Check the condition of the gas system using a qualified and registered gas fitter. The gas locker should vent overboard and a modification may be required to do this. If the gas pipes are old or original they should be replaced. Check the date on the flexible gas pipe that is attached to the cooker it should have a “replace by” or manufacture date. Some insurance companies are requesting that the gas system is professionally checked and certified each year.

ITEMS TO CHECK – HULL AND UNDER-WATER AREA

- Check condition of the hull for accident damage, particularly common at the bow. On some older boats the polyester gelcoat may become thin from years of polishing or repairs. Hulls can be repainted or re-gelled, the latter being more expensive but longer lasting and easier to repair.
- Check underwater areas for osmotic blisters and if possible check the moisture content of the laminate with a suitable moisture meter. Blisters are likely to be the result of osmosis if they release a vinegar-smelling liquid when popped. Many boats have been epoxy coated at some stage to avoid Osmosis and some have been professionally treated. It is not uncommon for the rudder to have a higher moisture content than the rest of the hull.
- Older rudders were filled with foam that could absorb water making them heavy and increasing the chance of rudder problems. Replacement rudders use closed-cell foam to resolve this problem.
- Check the front edge and bottom of keel for evidence of grounding that requires repair.
- Check rudder for play on upper and lower bearings
- Check prop-shaft for play in cutlass bearing
- If fitted with a feathering prop (often made by Darglow), twist and wiggle the blades to check for excessive play. These props need greasing each year and if required they can be rebuilt by Darglow to give them a new lease of life.

ITEMS TO CHECK – INSIDE

- Check the cap-shroud U bolts from the inside, the U bolt goes through a stainless steel bar that passes through a GRP knee. In early boats the steel bar was round and this caused point-loading on the nuts. A flat should be machined on this bar so that the nut touches the bar evenly. If the U bolt is more than 25 years old it is recommended that it is replaced with new.
- Many of the original 12 volt switch panels were only fitted with two high amperage (25A) thermo-mechanical trips. The rating of these trips may be too high to protect the size of cable used in the various circuits. The electrical circuits should have individual fuses of appropriate size. If wiring is original it may be sensible to completely rewire the boat.
- Check for evidence of leaks from windows, stanchion bases, rigging chain plates and other deck fittings as the original sealant used is likely to have gone hard over time
- Check condition of all seacocks, these will be Blakes if original. The cockpit drain seacocks are the most common to seize as they are left open and untouched (forgotten about) for long periods. If seized some work may be required to free them but with a little maintenance Blakes seacocks have a very long life. The latest version of the Blakes valve has a grease nipple to allow servicing afloat. The standard-fit seacocks are located as follows
 - 3 x seacock in the heads area for sea-toilet and basin outlet
 - 1 x seacock under sink in main saloon
 - 1 x seacock (may be a combination strainer and seacock) for engine either under the floor in front of engine case or beside engine case on some early boats
 - 2 x seacock under cockpit for cockpit drains, normally accessed via the main cockpit locker.
- Check condition of cockpit drain fittings and hoses, original cockpit drains are likely to be corroded if original. Access is normally via the main cockpit locker but may be different in early boats.
- Check bonding of the main bulkhead to the hull, in particular at the lower end of the bulkhead and around the lower lockers.
- Inspect the fresh water tank under the cabin sole, if it is the original GRP tank it will probably have some osmosis.

ITEMS TO CHECK – ENGINE

- Check condition of rubber tube that connects the stern tube and stuffing gland, this should be fitted with two jubilee clips at each end. The replacement rubber tube is cheap but requires removal of prop shaft and rudder or engine so is not a minor job. Disintegration of this rubber tube will cause flooding.
- Check bonding of rudder tube into hull and deck by reaching through the engine inspection hatches in quarter berth/cockpit locker.
- Check general condition of engine, they tend to expire from rust and misuse rather than overuse. Most original engines from 1970s built boats are likely to have been changed at least once. Original engines from the 1970s had 9-12hp that was sufficient but didn't leave much in reserve, common replacements are from Yanmar, Beta and Vetus and tend to have a maximum rating of 15-25hp. Fitting a very large engine is not a good idea as the propeller size is limited by the cutout in the skeg and it is much better to have a small diesel engine running hard (as designed) than a large engine running at little more than tickover for long periods.
- Check condition of fuel lines and diesel tank (in cockpit locker). On some boats the diesel tank does not have a tap to drain off sludge and water, fitting one may be a sensible option. Diesel tanks are generally made from stainless steel sheet but the welds at corners can corrode from the inside after many years in service. If possible draw of some fuel from the tank to check for sludge and diesel-bug.

SUPPLIERS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you would like any additional information about how to proceed with upgrades or repairs to your Contessa 32 an excellent forum is available on the Association website where you can post questions and draw on the collective knowledge of many owners.

Contessa 32 owners are in the very lucky position to be able to contact the original and current manufacturer of Contessa yachts, the team at Jeremy Rogers Yachts are extremely helpful and will offer free advice to owners as well as historical information about your particular Contessa. Jeremy Rogers Yachts can provide a range of spare parts and will carry out repairs both small and large, their contact details can be found on the Jeremy Rogers website.