



Black Streak Removers: Nautical Ease(ily) Wins

Polluted rain water causes those ugly streaks beneath your boat's rubrail, portlights, and scuppers. The marine industry offers at least nine specialized cleaners to get rid of them.

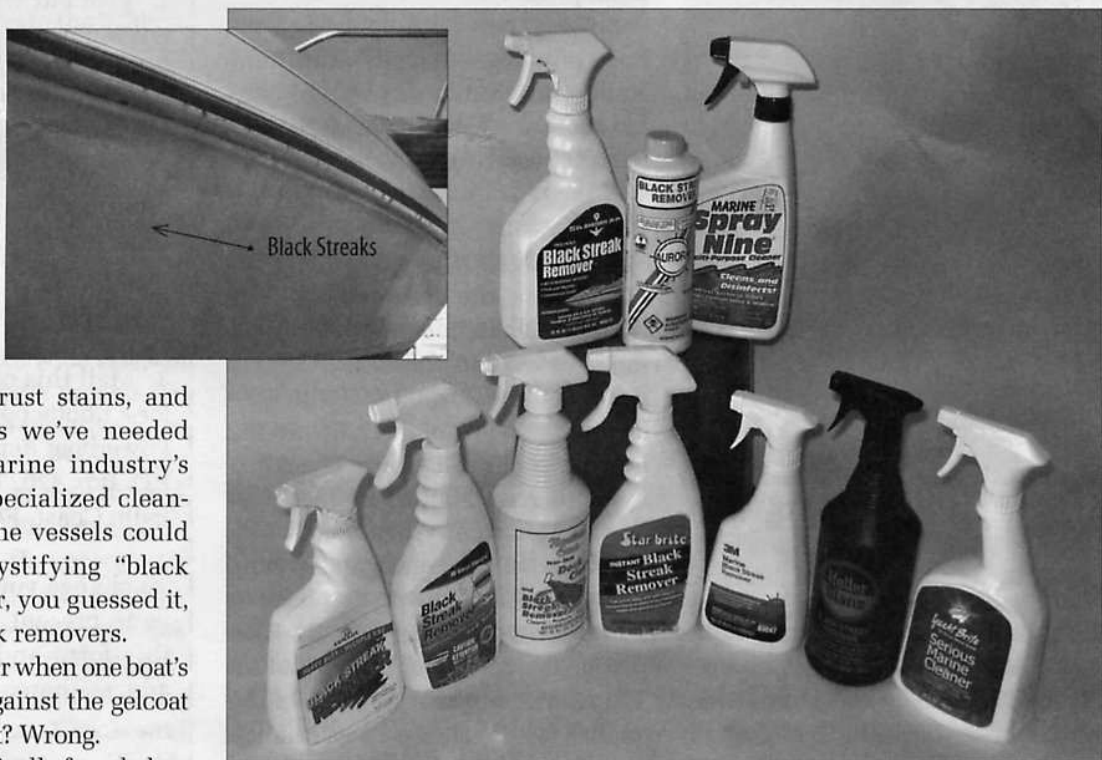
Our test boats failed us.

Over the past three years, the Neptune 212 and Twin Vee Awesome 22 have served as guinea pigs for many a maintenance test, providing, for example, the barnacles, the rust stains, and the waterline stains we've needed to evaluate the marine industry's dizzying array of specialized cleaning products. But the vessels could not give us the mystifying "black streaks" we need for, you guessed it, a test of black streak removers.

Black streaks occur when one boat's black rubrail rubs against the gelcoat of another boat, right? Wrong.

"Black streaks typically form below scuppers and drain holes, beneath ports and windows, and below stanchions," said Star brite Vice President Jeff Tieger. "The streak is made up of pollutants contained in rainwater. Once these pollutants hit a hard surface, they immediately bond and are difficult—if not impossible—to remove using regular boat washes and water. Black streak removers usually contain wetting agents, chelating agents (chemicals that dissolve minerals), and surfactants. They grab on to these stains chemically and then make them soluble."

We had no such streaks on either test boat, and we couldn't really foster their growth like we've done for



Bottom row, from left to right: Black streak removers from Armada, West Marine, Nautical Ease, Star brite, 3M Marine, and Heller Glanz. The product from Yacht Brite (far right) is a general cleaner that claims to remove black streaks. Top, from left to right: Marykate and Aurora black streak removers, and Marine Spray Nine's general purpose cleaner.

previous tests. For our rust stain test, for instance, we left chain, fish hooks, and rebar on the cockpit sole of the Neptune for a week.

So the quest to find a black-streaked boat began. We quickly learned that some black streaks are not really black streaks, or the ones that these cleaners are made to fight. Some streaks, like those that smeared the sides of an old Thompson powerboat we cleaned, require nothing but soap and water for removal. We needed the

real thing, and eventually found it on a 35-foot sailboat.

What We Tested—And How

Our group of cleaners included eight products specifically labeled as black streak removers (Armada, Aurora, West Marine, Marykate, Nautical Ease, Star brite, 3M Marine, and Heller Glanz) and two general-purpose marine cleaners that claim to remove these streaks (Marine Spray Nine and Yacht Brite Serious Marine Cleaner).

All but the Aurora are sprays. For most of the sprays, you simply apply the cleaner and wipe away with a clean cloth or sponge. A couple of the products instruct you to wait 30 seconds or so and then wipe.

The instructions on the bottle of the 3M Black Streak Remover say to spray on and rinse off—no wiping is mentioned. It should be. We found that the cleaner had no effect on the sailboat's stain after just spraying and rinsing. The only non-spray, Aurora, is a turquoise-colored liquid that you dab on a cloth or sponge and apply to the blemished area.

Testers tried soap and water on a portion of the streaked hull—and then the household cleaner Fantastik—to be sure the streaks were up to snuff. They were. Neither the soap nor the Fantastik worked well. We sectioned off the port side of the sailboat with painter's tape, giving each product its own streaked section. The cleaning commenced. We made sure to carefully follow the directions on the label of each product.

What We Found

In tests of more than a half-dozen products, we find our winners by whittling the field after an initial test. Five of the products easily removed the streaks from their sections and advanced to a second round of cleaning. They were the cleaners from Heller Glanz, Nautical Ease, West Marine, Spray Nine, and Aurora. Two cleaners—3M Black Streak Cleaner and the Yacht Brite Serious Marine Cleaner—removed only a small amount of the streaks.

Surprisingly, the Star brite cleaner did not work as well as the West Marine product, which is made by Star brite. Both consist of the same formula, said Tieger. The difference may have been related to the amount of time the cleaners had spent on the shelf. "One product sample could be older than the other, and that could have an effect on the performance as some chemicals degrade with age," Tieger said. He also explained that the streaks, even on the same section of boat, could differ.

We tried our top five cleaners on more

VALUE GUIDE: BLACK STREAK REMOVERS

Product	Size (oz.)	Price	Price/oz.	Price Source	Cleaning Rating
MARYKATE	32	\$9.99	\$0.32	Boater's World	Fair-
YACHT BRITE	32	\$6.99	\$0.22	Boater's World	Poor
STAR BRITE	22	\$9.99	\$0.45	West Marine catalog	Fair-
WEST MARINE	22	\$8.99	\$0.41	West Marine catalog	Good+
3M MARINE	16.9	\$14.99	\$0.89	West Marine catalog	Poor
HELLER GLANZ	32	\$19.99	\$0.63	hellerglanz.com	Excellent
AURORA	15	\$10.49	\$0.70	auroramarine.com	Good+
ARMADA	22	\$7.08	\$0.32	shipstore.com	Good
NAUTICAL EASE	32	\$7.29	\$0.23	nauticalease.com	Excellent
SPRAY NINE	25	\$8.99	\$0.36	West Marine catalog	Good+
FANTASTIK	32	\$3.00	\$0.09	CVS pharmacy	Fair-

streaks on the same side of the boat. It became clear that the Nautical Ease and the Heller Glanz worked best. With a couple of wipes of the cloth, the streaks were gone. The other cleaners worked, but required more effort or a second application. The testers used the Heller

Glanz and Nautical Ease to finish the job, cleaning the streaks that plagued the starboard side and transom.

Conclusion

The Heller Glanz cleaner is almost twice as expensive as the Nautical Ease, so our decision between the two is an easy one. Nautical Ease is the top pick based on performance and price. It is not as readily available as other cleaners, but you can order it online at nauticalease.com. The product has the added value of also being a non-skid cleaner—and an effective one.

It and two other cleaners shared runnerup honors in the most recent nonskid cleaner test (Jan. 05 issue). We also bought the Heller Glanz product through the web. We also recommend the cleaners from West Marine, Spray Nine, and Aurora. ■

3M Marine, 877/366-2746, 3M.com
Armada, 800/336-9320, armadacoatings.com
Aurora, 866/214-3444, auroramarine.com
Fantastik, 800/558-5252, fantastik.com
Heller Glanz, 866/657-2624, hellerglanz.com
Marykate, 800/272-8963, crcindustries.com
Nautical Ease, 800/783-7507, nauticalease.com
Spray Nine, 800/477-7299, spraynine.com
Star brite, 800/327-8583, starbrite.com
West Marine, 800/BOATING, westmarine.com
Yacht Brite, 800/643-2316, yachtbrite.com



Above: 3M Black Streak Remover (pictured here) and Yacht Brite Serious Marine Cleaner failed to fully clean their streaked sections.