

PRACTICAL

Varnish test results



One year on, and after 18 months' exposure to the British weather, how have the products on our test rig fared? *Richard Hare* brings the latest update

Well, what a dismal summer it was. Compared to the record summer of 2003 when our test pieces had the living daylight hammered out of them, they got off very lightly during 2004. It seemed as though the sun didn't come out until the autumn. By then, serious UV intensity was already spent.

Our test rig is assessed and photographed annually within a week of November 1, to bring you the benefit of our findings as you're beginning to haul off your winter awnings.

Here on, we'll be updating you once a year on the performance of all the participants as well as giving you the true costs involved (2002 cost basis – it provides a useful comparison), and we'll describe the maintenance implications as well.

We work closely to the manufacturers' recommendations. If they told us to apply 15 coats, that's exactly what we did.



We're off to Greece! It may be idyllic for us, but for timber and finishes this is the most corrosive environment we can find – Keppel's iroko brightwork will face the punishing combination of high salinity and intense UV. We will compare performance of a selection of products against the data provided by the test rig

We test products on two distinctly different and widely-used hardwoods – iroko and khaya (Africa mahogany) – to see if it makes any difference on a product's performance.

So far it hasn't – but we did de-grease the iroko well. Whereas khaya takes finishes well, iroko and teak are notoriously 'difficult' when it comes to wet finishing due to their oiliness. So, all iroko test pieces (excepting Coelan,

at the supplier's request) received a thorough wipe with cellulose spirit beforehand to de-grease the surface. Certainly, without this, few of the products would have adhered so well. We know – we've tried it.

Khaya we left 'au naturel' as we believe is the norm.

Price – more than meets the eye

Always check coverage rates and find out about shelf life. These are more

telling than the cost per litre. High solids products – those that sometimes cost more per litre, but require only two or three coats – can compare favourably with 'cheaper' products that call for 5-10 coats.

Shelf life can also affect cost. None of us likes throwing away half-used tins of varnish. Consider the benefit of a product that can be reopened and reused not just one but two years hence. We should certainly expect products to be usable for at least a few months for a mid-season or laying-up touch-up. There's good news here.

Application notes

For the full application notes – sanding and preparation – see CB189 (March 2004). The time it takes to build up a system to the manufacturers' recommendation is obviously important so, here, in brief:

Prima, Epifanes, Skipper Starwind UV and La Tonkinoise, varnishes, 5-coat system: five days.

Burgess Hydrosol,
2-coat system: one day.

Deks Olje full system
(D1 + D2): ten days. (D1
only: two days.)

Endeavour Marine Oil,
2-coat system: five days.

Sikkens Novatech,
3-coat system: three days.

Poliglass/Acriglass
6-coat system: just one day.

Coelan, 6-coat system:
two days, one day possible.

Varnol, 9-coat system:
two days.

To ensure that moisture couldn't gain access from the backs of the test pieces the reverse sides of all test pieces were completely encapsulated. Furthermore, their entire connection to the test rig was encapsulated too. So, only the outward facing surfaces were tested.

We have to be pragmatic. Whereas we're exposing the test pieces to some

pretty horrendous weather, we cannot simulate routine wear and tear. We have to be mindful that scratches and abrasions will always happen and these should be sealed up as soon as possible – and with the stipulated number of coats too. This alone can influence your selection... Here, the microporous systems are more tolerant. Furthermore, you may well be able to leave repairs until the end of the year.

Nominations

There are now some vacancies up on the test rig. Not all products have completed the course. So, if you have a 'wonder' product, or combination of products, that you'd like us to test alongside the others, let us know. We'd very much like to

hear from you. Contact us, giving the name of the product, and we'll take care of the rest. Let's share our experiences and put those vacant spaces up there on the rig to good use. Who knows – we may turn up a fantastic 'winner'.

What constitutes 'failure'? We've decided that a 'fail' is a finish system that breaks down within 18 months – it's reasonable to expect 18 months maintenance freedom, not least because it puts the annual 'freshening up' well within its time-span.

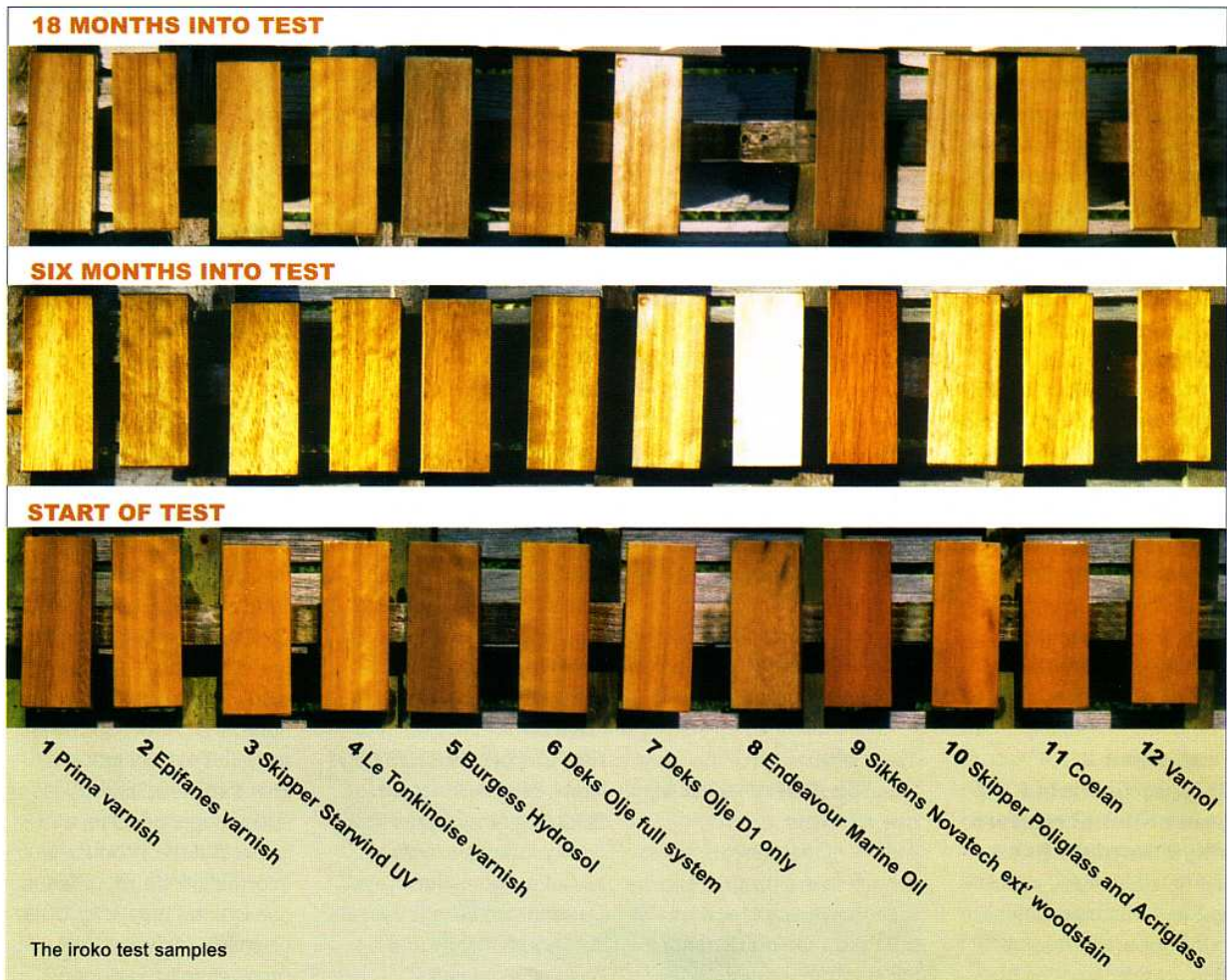
To be clear what we mean by 'breaking down' failure is deemed when the surface film becomes detached and/or bare wood is exposed. In other words, serious remedial action is needed imminently.

This applies as much to the end-grain as it does the surface.

Although we've 'test-passed' all products that made it past the 18-month benchmark, we will continue monitoring them to destruction, and upgrade their rating accordingly. Subsequent years of successful performance will improve their pass rating to 'Pass+1', 'Pass+2', etc – the number being the years it performs beyond the 18-month benchmark.

The results to date

Products marked with an asterisk (ie: Pass*) are on the cusp. Although the finishes on all five sides are completely intact (and look good too), there is the early sign of breakdown (very small delamination/ wood greying) along the



The iroko test samples