

50plus Handyman



Busman's Holidays

50plus Handyman director Roger Runswick looks into boating, bump starting and holiday tips.

As a handyman service 50plus receives a wide range of requests. Some we have to respectfully decline (requests to cut hair come to mind) but for others we delight in the challenge, put on our thinking caps and come up with a solution. When we go on holiday we generally leave most of the tools behind but find it always pays to take one or two as of course something always comes up.

This year the family Runswick took a look at the weather forecast (which ranged from hot to very hot), thought water and went off to mess about on the river (well canal mostly). You'd think that would be a fairly work free environment but the boat (albeit hired) needed a few running repairs, the bike needed a chain reattaching (always take a bike on a canal boat to get to shops, otherwise you find yourself navigating according to the nearest Tesco) and then there was the odd motorist in distress. One doesn't often find motorists in need of assistance on a boating holiday but mooring near a 'country park' with the inevitable associated car park probably helped. The young lad, accompanied by two young ladies, had spent the night in the car as it 'wouldn't start'. I don't think the girls had found it a tall tale as by this time it was 7am and despite the warmth a small car is not the most comfortable place to spend the night. Flat batteries were not all that uncommon in my youth and one thing I learnt about fairly early in my car owning life was how to tighten up a battery connection and how to 'bump start' a car. Obviously these basics have not been handed down to the current generation as the suggestion to push start the vehicle was met with blank stares (goodness knows what they would have thought of a starting handle). So having obtained the requisite screwdriver, dealt with the loose terminal and suggested that pushing would be easier with just one person in the car and three outside, a short heave, drop the clutch and all was purring sweetly. The revelation that such a feat was not only possible but also worked was greeted with thanks in the form of 'you're a f***** star mate! It was as least well meant.

But enough of holiday delights and on to more practical tips. Before you go away turn off the water. I know it's not winter but do it just in case an unused ball valve starts an overflow running and anyway it will make you use the stop cock which otherwise will be left unturned yet again. If you have an RCD (safety switch, usually in the consumer unit/fuse box) check to see if you have a 'split' consumer unit. In these the RCD protects some of the circuits but not all. You can tell, there will be a black line under the RCD and some of the circuit breakers. Most notably the lights shouldn't be on the RCD protected part. If you have an older style consumer unit with an RCD protecting everything then don't use the main lights for security. Often a bulb blowing can trip the RCD and hey presto the freezer's off and you come to a bad fly problem amongst other unmentionable things. Invest a small amount in a separate surge/RCD protected extension block or socket and time switches for a standalone light(s) for security. Plug this into a mains circuit and the chances are that if a bulb blows the freezer circuit will still be operational.

And do enjoy the holiday.

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