

Southern Charm

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Steps to troubleshoot hydraulic steering problems

If your steering is harder than you think it should be.

Remember that unless you have a power-assist steering pump that is attached to the engine (like your car), you do not have power steering, simply hydraulic steering. Hydraulic steering generally makes turning the steering wheel much easier than manual steering, but it is almost never 'one finger' steering. Most vessels under 35 feet in length will not have power-assist.

If you just purchased this vessel, try to ascertain from the previous owner whether the steering was always hard or if this is a new problem.

If you have owned this vessel since it was new and the steering has gotten harder over time, go through the following steps:

1. Make certain that there are no kinks in the hoses of your steering system
2. Make sure you have a full reservoir of fluid.
3. Remove the bolt(s) that attach the steering cylinder to your engine, outdrive, or rudder and attempt to turn your engine, outdrive, or rudder by hand. If it moves freely, turn the steering wheel and see if it is still hard to turn.
4. If the wheel turns very easily at this point and your engine, outdrive, or rudder also turns very easily, Lube all the fittings on the engine, outdrive, or rudder as preventative maintenance and re-attach the cylinder.
5. If the wheel is still hard to turn, even with no forward or reverse motion of the vessel and the engine out of gear, call us at 800-745-0765

If you turn the wheel and the engine, outdrive, or rudder turns slowly, only partway, or only in one direction: probably your cylinder needs to be service and re-sealed. Call us at 800-745-0765.

If your steering is slow or 'mushy': You probably have air in the system. Consult your owner's manual for bleed instructions.

You have a leak around the helm shaft behind the steering wheel: Your helm needs to be serviced and re-sealed. **STOP! This is not a do-it-yourself**

job! Unless you are experienced at hydraulic repairs and specifically familiar with the inner workings of your brand of helm, we do not recommend that you attempt repairs in the field. Call us at 800-745-0765. Small leaks won't prevent your system from operating as long as you keep the reservoir topped up with fluid, but you should not operate this way any longer than necessary to get back to port.

Bumpy helm operation, or if the wheel feels like it is jumping as you turn it: This can indicate air in the system. Try bleeding the system first. If this does not change it, there is probably trash in one of the check valves in the helm. This is not a do-it-yourself job. Call 800-745-0765

If your boat drifts off course even though you are not changing the steering wheel or rudder angle: You may have a check valve in the helm that needs servicing or the cylinder needs servicing or both.

If you have a three line system with a separate reservoir and the pressure drops regularly:

1. Check for leaks throughout the system. Be sure to carefully check for indications of oil around the cylinder and the back and top of the helm as well as around the reservoir. Check every area of the vessel where the hydraulic hoses run, particularly where they go through bulkheads or around corners.
2. If there are no visible leaks, mix a teaspoon of dish soap in a gallon of water and pump up your system to 30 pounds. Put some of the soapy water on the top of the reservoir, around the gauge, fill cap, and pump on the top of the reservoir and watch for bubbles. If bubbles are seen around any of the fittings, thoroughly clean the top of the unit, then after drying it , remove the part that has the leak around it. You might try carefully wrapping the threads with Teflon tape and screwing it back in or call us for a replacement part or reservoir as needed.