

Spring Has Sprung ... But, Hopefully, Your Steering Hasn't!

How to Check, Maintain, and Replace Mechanical Steering

by The Teleflex Tech Guy

Finally! The season of rebirth -Spring – is here again. And with it, another boating year is again upon us! But just as you had prepared your vessel for the past winter season, you'll need to verify the integrity of your steering system prior to casting your first line and hooking that first catch.

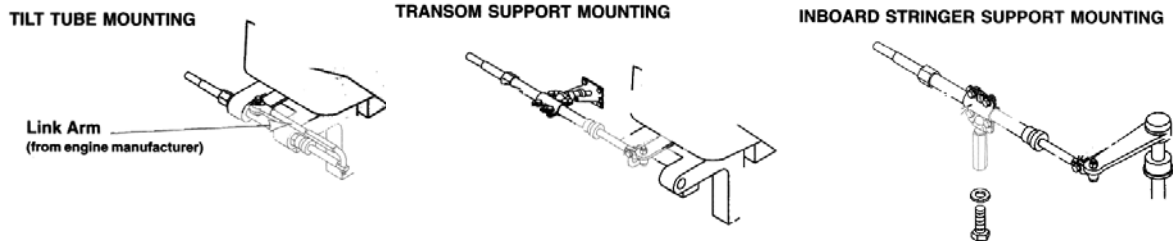
Chances are, it will be fine. But if the steering is stiff, STOP and read the rest of this article, as it *will* save you time, effort, and money!

Myth: Use your steering wheel to break your steering free.

Reality: Using the steering wheel to break stiff steering can break the helm.

Where to begin

It's clear that most steering problems are caused by a lack of proper maintenance. Steering maintenance is performed back at the engine or rudder, as that's where the large coupler nut at the end of the plastic jacket of the steering cable resides. From that nut to the end of the cable, there is a 5/8" telescoping rod with a 3/8" hole at the end. That rod goes through a support or tilt tube. The engine or rudder is then connected by the engine manufacturer's link arm or other connection kit. (see diagrams)



Disconnect the steering cable at the attaching point and undo the coupler nut at the end of the cable's plastic jacket. Then grab the plastic jacket and pull toward the side of the boat until the shaft of the cable is completely out of the support tube. (If you can't get it completely out, pull it as far out as possible.)

Clean both the shaft of the cable and the support tube. Then put waterproof *Marine Grease* in the tube and on the shaft and re-assemble.

NOTE: The coupler nut has a locking ring in the threads. Ensure the nut is drawn up fully and that its internal locking ring is engaged. *There will be excessive play in your steering system if this nut is not fully tightened!*

What if my steering cable gets stuck in the support tube?

For a stuck steering cable:

1. Assemble the following supplies -- penetrating oil, a piece of wood, rubber mallet/hammer, and wrenches
2. Undo the large coupler nut at the end of the cable's plastic jacket
3. Undo the link arm from the steering cable only
4. Put the nut back on the link arm so it doesn't get lost!
5. Try to loosen the cable by wiggling; then try to pull it out of the support tube
6. Still not out? Spray penetrating oil in from both ends and try again. If this doesn't work, wait 30 minutes and try again.
7. If the cable *still* refuses to come out of the support tube, place a piece of wood on the link arm end of the steering cable and TAP it with a mallet/hammer. The key word here is "TAP," as excessive force can damage the engine bracket.
8. Again out of luck? It appears you'll have to cut the cable (by the large nut) and remove the support tube from the engine bracket. Naturally, you'll have to buy a new steering cable and a support tube (if it is on the engine bracket it is an engine manufacturer's part). And don't forget the WATERPROOF MARINE GREASE!

Getting a new replacement steering cable

Most steering cables have a part number stamped onto the cable's plastic jacket at the helm end. (You may need a mirror and flashlight to find this number!) Teleflex cables begin with the letters SSC, for Steering System Cable.

We recommend hooking a fish line to the old cable so you have something with which to pull the new cable back through the boat.

On non-power assisted outboard and I/O boats, a complete steering system upgrade is recommended at this time. The Teleflex patented No Feedback (NFB™) Steering significantly helps to reduce the need to "fight the wheel" and as such, greatly eases user fatigue – especially in the arms.

It's *your* call. You can replace the steering cable or, for a few dollars more, upgrade to a complete steering system with NFB. Personally, the *only* fight I want to have on my boat is the one between me and the 30-pound fish at the other end of the line!