

On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson



The travel lift groaned and all 40 feet of *Patty 'O* came dripping out of her element. Once clear of the travel lift well, Ray, the yard foreman moved her to the collection of poppits and keel blocks that was to be her home for a while. We come out of the water every spring and fall for bottom work and other maintenance that is easier to perform on dry land than tied to the dock. *Patty 'O* rode the whole way on the travel lift, rather than being transported by the big, yellow yard trailer. Large wooden boats don't like modern ways of land transport, and so the quicker we could get her set on the keel blocks, the better.

This fall, there was a bit more than power-washing her bottom and a fresh coat of antifouling paint, though. One of *Patty 'O's* former owners (there have been two) had decided that headlights mounted in the bow would give him an edge over the lobster pots while running at night. While you can certainly see pots right under your bow with these things, they completely ruin your night vision. And they have been a royal pain ever since we bought the boat.

Mounted in the bow, three feet back from the stem, they have always leaked regardless of the formula for the goo used to bed them, or the material of which the various gaskets I've tried in my unsuccessful attempts to render them watertight. The problem is basic. *Patty O'* is a wooden boat, and wooden boats move. The holes for the mounts were cut right in the middle of two planks, and that produced a weak spot in *Patty O's* bow that's impossible to fix. Well,

not exactly impossible, because this was the year that the accursed headlights were going to go.

Enlisting the help of my friend Ritchie, who among other talents, is a pretty good boatwright, we had carefully planed the attack. Once *Patty O'* was settled on the blocks, Ray asked the usual question. "How long ya gonna be?" He asked this every time we came out of the water. Ray, like most boatyard managers is suspicious of any large, wooden boat sitting on land. Many times, it's for the last time, and the yards seldom collect what's owed. But *Patty O'* looks pretty good, and Ray knows that as our home, we are more inclined than some to get her back in as soon as possible.

"We'll be out a couple weeks this time," I said. "We're gonna remove the headlights."

Ray replied with an unintelligible grunt that sounded like "Bout time."

"Lemme know," he said as he climbed back into the cab of the travel lift and rumbled off.

Ritchie helped me rig the patent staging I had rented next to the cockpit on the port side. Patent staging is that collection of pipes and hangers that you see big construction companies rig when working on buildings. This would make it a lot easier to climb into the boat, something that the Blonde, my wife, would appreciate.

After that chore was over, we rigged A-frame staging on either side of the bow and got to work. An eight-inch circular sander ground all the paint off the

planks in question. There were two planks on each side that had to come out. The longest was 16 feet, and the other was nine feet, on each side. I hoped that the longer ones could be re-used to replace the nine-footers. By four that afternoon, we had the starboard side all opened up and could take a close look at what was what.

The short, three-foot planking forward of the lights had been the week spot and it was obvious that we were none too soon in tearing these out. The hood end of each plank, where they're attached to the stem had been working, and the fasteners had begun to loosen. Had we waited much longer, irreversible damage could have occurred to the stem, requiring a major repair.

The Blonde pulled her Saab right next to *Patty O'*, got out and survived the situation, hands on her hips. "Well, that's an improvement," she said. One of her biggest peeves was having to climb a ladder to get to her "house" while we were out of the water, and once, when *Patty O'* was out for several weeks, I'd sprung for a hotel room just down the road. But that wasn't the answer either. The patent staging had come with an optional set of stairs and I could see that

continued on page 59

Send us your dirty fabrics...
We'll return them to you
cleaned and protected!



Before



After



Awning Cleaning Industries

The Outdoor Fabric Specialists

29 Fitch Street, New Haven, CT 06515

1-800-542-3009

e-mail: info@cleancanvas.com

www.cleancanvas.com

When
was your last
Great Date?



Great Date Now

Hand Selected Introductions

For Upscale Attractive Singles

(516) 673-0777

Nassau • Suffolk • Westchester • Manhattan
Fairfield • New Haven • Bergen • Morris

GREATDATENOW.COM

On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson



continued from page 58

I had made husband of the month, even though the cost was a bit steep.

By noon the next day, we had the port side opened and found the damage was worse to the stem on that side, but not insurmountable. It took the rest of the day of fussing to realize that we weren't going to be able to fit the longer planks where the shorter ones had been. Armed with that unfortunate information, I began the quest for replacement planks.

After checking with all the local lumberyards and receiving several blank stares, I did what I should have done in the first place. Hopefully, the small Rhode Island sawmill where I'd gotten planking for *Patty O'* to replace ones crushed in a collision with a fishing dragger a few years back was still in operation. This meant a trip up I-395 to the spot where Connecticut and Rhode Island come together. Some may wonder why I didn't let my fingers do the walking and call them, but not only did I not have their phone number, but they weren't listed in any directory to which I had access. But it was a nice day and traffic was light.

I remembered the dirt road well and at its end I was pleased to see Oscar, the sawmill's owner atop an ancient forklift moving a great tree trunk over to the bigger of the two giant saw rigs, which looked old enough to have had cut wood for early 20th century schooners. I waited until Oscar had deposited his load

and had nodded to his helper. He climbed down off the forklift and walked over. "Whatcha break now?" he asked in that flat Rhode Island accent.

"You remember me?" I said, surprised that he did.

"Yeah. You're the guy what got the oak and mahogany a while back."

We leaned against the side of my truck while I explained what I needed. He scratched his head and then shook it. "Yeah, I can still get that, but you ain't gonna like the price."

I didn't. Four 16-foot Honduran mahogany planks, one inch thick by six wide... 96 cents a linear inch, plus shipping. It seems that the price per inch looks less than the price per foot. Whatever. But, hey: what would I be paying for replacement windows in a house?

Oscar said that he would call me when he got a delivery date. I asked him if they could be drop-shipped to the boat yard, and he said he'd check. "But I'll need cash up front for that," he said. It would, of course, mean a trip back up here, but I remembered the ride home last time, with lumber sticking out over the tailgate of my old pickup, expecting any minute to be stopped. The extra trip would be worth it.

Back at the yard, all the so-called experts were standing around *Patty O'* looking at the gaps in her sides. The group was made up of most of the sages who had "supervised" *Patty's* rebuild after the collision.

"You'll never get her tight again," said one.

"How you gonna fair her out?" asked another.

"Whatcha need to do, is ta..."

And I remembered other times when we had done work on *Patty O'*, work that was quite visible, and had gotten the same attention. I smiled, and listened to them all, nodding my head at the appropriate times. Hey, they all meant well and who knows? One of them just might have an answer to something one of these days. Besides, in truth, most of them HAD been around when boats built of wood were common.

We sat in the cockpit with tall glasses of ice tea, watching the shadows grow long and I explained how everything was going to the Blonde. She raised an eyebrow when I told her how much the planks were going to cost. "All the extra, we're going to save," I said. "Even the old ones, they're going to the storage container."

"Good." She said. "Waste not, want not. Now, are you going to feed me, or what? Those stairs aren't all that steep."

"Nope. They sure aren't."

Ocean

OUTBOARD

www.oceanoutboard.com



VERADO
TAKE CHARGE!

VENTURE

We're the Northeast's only full stocking dealer.

From 27' - 39', open and cuddy models available, all Mercury Verado Powered! Come see these exciting boats today!

The Best Built Open Fisherman Ever Built

Re-Power this Fall and Save!

The long winter season is the perfect time to re-power. You'll save hundreds or even thousands of dollars and your boat will be ready to go when you are in the spring. Take advantage of these off season savings and call us today to discuss the custom installation of the Mercury Outboard that's perfect for your boat and boating style. Our expert staff can guide you through this process, insuring a perfect match. Whether it's one of the exciting new Verado's, a tried and true Optimax 2-stroke, or a high performance engine you won't be disappointed.



MERCURY
"1 On The Water"

Sales: 351 South Main Street Freeport, New York 11520

516-378-8700

Service: 2976 Whaleneck Drive Merrick, New York 11566

516-378-6400

Summer Clearance

"Don't Be Left At The Dock"

POLAR

Family Fishing Boats
C/C, Duals, W/A 19' - 27'

1st Time Boat Owner Special
\$289/down - \$289/mo.
19' CC 115 Yamaha 4-stroke + trailer



CHAPARRAL

Cruisers, Bowriders
& Sportboats 18' - 35'
Quality Doesn't Cost More
6 Year Engine Warranty



NorthCoast

26' Center Console w/Twin 250 Verados
28' Express Fish w/Twin 225 Verados
Display Blow-Out Save \$30,000



Many Used Boats Available • Call For Details



Amity Harbor Marine.com

30 Merrick Road, Amityville, NY **631 842-1280**

Tuesday - Saturday 9:30am - 5:30pm • Sunday 10am - 4pm • Closed Monday