

Happy in a Habitent

What better way to conduct a long-term test of a Habitent cockpit cover than for liveaboards to deploy it over the course of a winter? Mark Green reports

TESTED



Water Lily with Habitent cockpit enclosure in place

The first winter we spent living aboard our Cobra 850 *Water Lily* represented a steep learning curve. Top of our 'lessons learned' list was the need for an effective cockpit cover. I'd experimented in the boatyard with a tarpaulin that was fine for access via the stern, but which wasn't going to suit access amidships from a finger pontoon. After attempting to build a cheap and robust shelter without success, I was giving up hope of spending anything under the £1,000 quoted for a cockpit cover.

Cue the Habitent, which I found when reading PBO. At £360 plus delivery, it was a third of the cost of a conventional cover. The only snag was that the Habitent was then only available for broader-stern boats with an aft end width of around 2m. *Water Lily's* slender 1.3m posterior just didn't seem suitable. The potential market for yachts with a pinched-in stern seemed huge, so I

contacted Habitent's creators Brian and Christine Hamilton to see if they could help with a slimmer version of their brainchild.

Christine told me they'd had several other enquiries for a narrower-stern version and that they'd commissioned a prototype from their manufacturers. Unfortunately, the narrower version was untested and a production model wouldn't be available until the spring. Luckily, Brian and Christine were intrigued by our plan to live aboard during the winter and agreed to let us test the prototype.

So, on 1 December the Habitent was fitted to *Water Lily* at her winter berth in Poole Quay Boat Haven. This first fitting took around 20 minutes, but I've since put the Habitent up by myself in around 10. The fixing points are secured by three

mechanisms: adjustable webbing straps, anchor-shaped sliding hooks on the skirt of the Habitent attached via bungees onto deck fittings and cleats or stanchion bases, and a pole assembly at the stern which pushes together to form an upside down 'U' which is strapped to the pushpit. When a sprayhood is not in use or if increased headroom is required, the bow end pole is clipped onto a halyard to form a 'coat hanger'. When tensioned via straps to the handrails on the coachroof and at its foot, the cockpit tent is formed.

Initially I wanted to see how a standard Habitent installation would fare during the winter, so I didn't personalise the fixing points to *Water Lily*. Having survived winds in excess of 40 knots at our Poole Quay Boat Haven berth however, the Habitent's ability to cope with the worst of the British winter has been very impressive.

The Habitent is currently marketed in two sizes: M (200-240cm stern width) and M-NS (160-200cm stern width). Plenty of straps and bungees are supplied to enable a fitting to most small and medium-size yachts.

Standing headroom in our cockpit under the cover is 5ft 4in. *Water Lily's* cockpit sole isn't as deep as it could be though, so it wouldn't surprise me if standing room is greater in other yachts. Regardless, there's certainly enough headroom to remove wet weather gear in the shelter of any cockpit.

With summer around the corner,

we relocated to Davis's Boatyard for a few weeks' boat work. I took the opportunity to install a handful of additional fixing points to *Water Lily*. These minor modifications have pinched in the fabric around the Habitent skirt, making the corners a snugger fit. With the mast removed for re-rigging, I made up a small wooden A-frame to attach a rope mini-halyard to support the bow-end pole and centre lift-point. Access to and from the boat is now via a ladder off the stern. This is perfectly suited to the Habitent's

The Habitent helped guarantee marital harmony

large stern-window, which zips up to form a convenient access point. This is one of three such

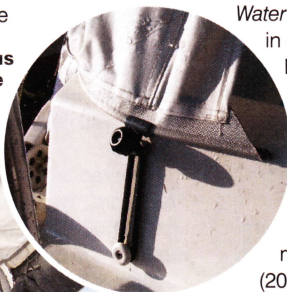
doorways that, when all rolled up, also form a bimini. When packed away, the Habitent bag is about the size of a two-person tent.

Overall I've been really impressed with the Habitent. It's performed brilliantly as a 'one size fits all' model, without the need for any additional modification. However, when I added four strategically-positioned bungee fixing points, it performed even better. Nicky has nicknamed the Habitent the 'happy tent' because of the difference it's made to our comfort aboard. Gone are the days of rain driving into the cabin or wet weather gear dripping all over the bedding after we've taken our dog Poppy out for a walk. In fact, I'd almost go as far as saying that during foul weather, the Habitent helped to guarantee marital harmony on board!

■ www.habitent.com

■ For our report on the wider-width Habitent, see PBO June 2011.

RIGHT Various mechanisms are employed for attachment



There's enough headroom to remove wet weather gear in the cockpit