

TRIED AND TESTED

Jonty Pearce tries a novel cockpit shelter while Duncan Kent checks out a new Raymarine plotter

Habitent Cockpit Enclosure

Fancy more accommodation? Jonty Pearce saves a fortune with a pre-made cockpit tent.

Awild weekend in Laugharne convinced us that a cockpit enclosure is highly desirable for cruising West Wales. *Aurial*, our Southerly 105 ketch, has a wonderfully bright saloon, but the sprayhood and dodgers only give partial shelter at anchor. Cockpit cocktails are great on fine evenings, but as the light fails the chill drives us below. My wife Carol loves warmth and agreed that an enclosure would extend the time spent 'up top', boost heat retention throughout the boat, and create a dry, sheltered area for drying oilskins.

A zip-on extension to the sprayhood with a removable stainless steel frame would have cost far more than anticipated, and the folded framework would obstruct our favourite perches in the cockpit. We'd also have to drill unwanted holes in the deck.

We sought out Habitent's Christine and Brian Harrison for a discussion. Their product is inspired by camping and uses lightweight ripstop nylon, a



After the initial fitting, we achieved a good, taut fit with no loose flapping areas or creases

clever curved and grooved pole assembly, telescopic carbon-fibre support poles and various straps and bungee cords to enable fitting to a variety of different boats. A clear front window can lie over or replace the sprayhood. Side and rear windows offer the options of mosquito nets or privacy screens. Access is through zipped and clipped seams at the window margins, allowing the side and rear windows to be rolled up.

It takes time to deduce the optimum fitting arrangement. We used the boom and mizzen for support, whilst the orange webbing strap provided a forward anchor over the

sprayhood. Interlocking poles supported the aft end, while the side and back webbing kept the structure taut. Our choice was to leave the sprayhood up, and it's a tad taller than the Habitent, so there's a slight gap along the side decks, but it's usually covered by our spray dodgers (removed for the photo). The mizzen interfered with the stern webbing, but adjustment resolved this. After recording our particular arrangement, the Habitent took 10-15 minutes to deploy and half that to pack away, using straps around the mizzenmast to support the frame whilst the canvas is kept tidy by karabiner clips that both clarified the orientation and facilitated folding. I'm sure that

the end of a sloop's boom could be used in a similar way.

Habitent is a 'one size fits all' product and will never fit as well as a tailor-made canopy, but it costs a fraction of the price and needs no permanent fixings. Indeed, my only gripe was at the size of the stowage bag – and this has now been rectified.

The Habitent comes in two sizes, both 3m long: there's a slim one for cockpits that are about 1.6m wide at the rear end, and a 2.4m-wide version for beamier boats. Full details and advice are on the website.

Price From £445

Contact Hamilton Innovation

Tel 07870 480241

Web www.habitent.com



Looking aft inside the canopy from the companionway, with one privacy screen down and Velcro roof straps for internal lighting

OUR VERDICT

PROS

- Good headroom and lots of space inside
- A lot cheaper than a custom-made canopy
- It can be transferred between boats – you could even take it with you on a charter holiday

CONS

- It's never going to fit as perfectly as a tailor-made canopy
- It will take more time and effort to rig and de-rig than a purpose-made canopy
- It's not hurricane-proof (what is?) but it's secure in force 6-7
- It won't fit all yachts. Some boats have too-narrow cockpits

RATING

8/10