The simple boat tent

Every so often we see new members square up to the task of shelter. Our regulars laughed at my first tent, and my second (thanks Len) *(No we didn't! We all had to start somewhere! Liz)*
It's been a while since Rogers article on boat tents for Dinghy Sailing Magazine and very little has appeared in recent issues of the bulletin. One new material has appeared in recent years which can be very cheap.
Materials
Polytarp
Sarah and I started making a boom tent for the Wayfarer using a cheap (thin) polytarp. I had misgivings about whether it would be strong enough, it seemed awful lightweight. 2 years later and it's still OK . This stuff is really good, the main problem is condensation and to a lesser extent cold.

Tyvec
Tyvec is the Dupont trademark for a range of non woven textiles made from polyethelene fibre. It is waterproof (pretty much) and breathable. It is also marketed by companies other than Dupont under different names. The stuff I have made my new tent from is intended for wrapping timber frame houses up prior to the outer layer of bricks being built. It is silver on the outside and white inside and has a much warmer feel than polytarp. I am hoping it may cure condensation problems. Normally available as a roll 100m long, 9 feet wide. Offcuts occasionally appear, sometimes for free.

Gaffer tape
Cloth reinforced sticky tape 2" wide Silver or occasionally black. Buy some decent stuff from somewhere other than the 99p shop. A big roll 6"across should do one tent.

Eyelets
In the past I have managed to rescue the old eyelets from the polytarp and reposition them in the tent. You have to crunch them up to get them out, cut a hole in the tent in the right place and flatten them out into it. As my latest tent was from Tyvek I had no eyelets so I had to use an eyelet kit from a chandlery. I used the 3/8 size which comes with a punch and setting tool. Slow and fiddly but works well enough.

String- anything 4 mm upwards

Holding it up
All I've ever used is a halyard from somewhere up the mast to support the boom end to hold the tent up. The boom can slop from side to side but this can be cured with a line from each aft quarter to hold it steady. It's been fine in a F7. I've not investigated moving the gooseneck up each night but it would give more headroom. It's a trade-off with windage. Enough people think a boom crutch is vital equipment to suggest it's worth investigating.

Holding it down

Tent tied to hooks under gunwale.

This is the favourite, either with line or elastic. Fix hook to boat. Fix eyelet to tent. Attach line between them, done. Having a single line joining onto two separate eyelets can work. The line goes from one eyelet, under a hook, along to the next hook back up to the other eyelet.

Tied under boat

People grizzle about this. It's worked well on our Wayfarer. Obviously you have to be afloat to put the tent up and down. We have 5 lines attached to the tent of the correct length with a hook on each. The lines are passed under the transom and each hooked onto a loop on the opposite side of the tent, The main halyard is tied to the aft end of the boom. Haul on the halyard, the tent pops up tensioned evenly every time.

Getting down to it

You need a dry day, not too windy, ideally with the boat on a trailer

Equipment

Polytarp (or whatever), scissors, masking tape, gaffer tape, marker pen, extra string, tape measure.

First thing is to work out the headroom. In a very small boat you may not be able to sit up straight but you should be able to sit up enough to cook. The aft buoyancy tank is the only "comfortable" seat in my Mirror. Prop or tie the boom in place at about the right height above the boat. It's worth making sure the aft end of the boom is higher than the front so that if you need to fit a gutter under the boom the water will run the right way. If you are planning to furl the sail around the boom (recommended) when you overnight, do this before you start making the tent. It alters the headroom and the amount of material needed

Throw the polytarp over the boom so it hangs down the sides of the boat. You will probably be able to make the tent in one piece with no joins so make sure there is enough aft of the transom to form the doors. The same goes for in front of the mast. Start sticking the tarp to the topsides of the boat with masking tape, cutting the spare off the hem as you go. Cut from the very front of the tent to the mast so the material lies along the boom and from the very back to the aft end of the boom to form the doors. Tape the doors shut and cut off the surplus. Cut around any standing rigging which gets in the way.

Mark on the polytarp where the eyelets will go. Our Wayfarer uses 5 each side aft of the shrouds and one in front whilst my Mirror uses 4 aft and 2 in front for a tent which covers the whole boat. Try and make it about the same on both sides of the boat.

Take the polytarp off and lay it on the ground. All cut edges will be "hemmed" on at least one side with gaffer tape. Where eyelets and Velcro are to go it wants at least a single layer on both sides. Any inside corners such as where the tent is cut around a shroud need to be thoroughly reinforced. Sewing the Velcro is hassle. You've got to be in the right frame of mind. Stick the Velcro in place with a little bit of tape every 4" to keep it flat, Get some beers in, empty the ashtray. It's going to be a long haul. I use a sail needle and thick polyester thread (for everything, even fixing my jeans). It is mainly the ends of the Velcro which are going to fail. Plenty of stitches here, the middles are less important.

Solving problems

Drips from the boom

I suspect this has a lot to do with using a halyard to hold the boom up. Rain hits the halyard, runs down to the boom, into the sail and drips off it right in the middle of the boat. It wasn't funny the night I spent at Ashlett in a F7 when there was 2" of rain recorded at St Catherine's point. A piece of waterproof material the length of the boom can be tied up under it to run any water to the mast. Just don't touch the mast. My original was a piece of polytarp. A better version with strings attached was made for our Wayfarer. It's good but not very durable and the slightest hole makes it as good as useless. Possibly better than this is "damp proof course" A heavy polythene ribbon available by the roll in various lengths and widths from builders merchants.

Can't knot bungee cord

"Knottable "bungee cord is a big con. Standard bungee knots just fine if you use the right knot. For a bend try the fishermans knot, for a loop the perfection (or anglers) loop. For the most part neither slip or jam.

Gaffer tape won't stick to old, dirty or salty polytarp

White spirit and loo roll works wonders

Worried about chafe wearing through the tent, spiky fittings on the gaff

Gaffer tape, multiple layers

Can't fix hook into hull because it's a buoyancy tank.

A poor answer perhaps, I made some circles of ply with a groove cut into the edge. Stuck to the hull with marine glue these hold the rope in place but slow the boat through the water.