

# The Artful Dodger

by Don Gilchrist

He's right. Get the wrong sort of dodgers and canopy on the boat, and they are, invariably, a pain in the wot not. And ineffective. And usually way too expensive. In this unusual report, Don Gilchrist examines some of the fundamentals and makes some hard-experience recommendations from half a lifetime cruising the oceans of the world, and lately, the GBR, from his home base in Yorkeys Knob, FNQ.

I have lived close to the beach almost all my life and between the ages 10 to 17 my family were lucky enough to have a beach house at Port Hughes on the west coast of S.A's Yorke Peninsula.

We used it every weekend and school holidays and I knew the road so well I could feign sleep on my mother's lap and know every bump and turn.

I spent my entire child hood a dark chocolate brown with a white bum. Then the sun was my friend and I loved it. At 38 degrees S I guess you could get away with it a bit but nowadays I regard each mole and freckle with careful suspicion.

After graduation and a stint in the army I did the classical "young Aussie dental graduate goes to the UK and Bashes the Nash for a few

years". Eventually the weather defeated me and I came home travelling the cheapest way possible at the time. Charter jet from Gatwick near London to Singapore, then a Russian ship to Perth and the Trans



Apart from the addition of spreaders and a small extension to the original dodger to temporarily increase shade aft this is how we took delivery of B5. The lack of airflow and poor vision forward might be OK down south out of the coral but up here in FNQ's humid tropical conditions, it's no good at all.



This shot of B4 shows a lot. Typical mounting efforts to get a fixed dodger onto a boat in the tropics with the frame mounting to the cabin forward of the windscreen. It leaked! The hand-rails around the windscreen were great underway but precluded the use of clears which had no upper mounting built in anyway. There was good standing headroom and the dodger did project forward far enough over the base of the windscreen. The dodger was not a bad effort but the less said about my lamentable picnic awning the better. It was ugly, clumsy and expensive.

Australian Railway east.

But the point of this brief digression is the significance of the 20 minutes that I bared my skin to the tropical sun at the equator aboard the *MV Khabarovsk* homeward bound. The

consequent blistering and suffering taught me a simple lesson; low latitudes, low skin exposure. This still has yet to fully permeate the sunshine state but the cumulative effect of chronic sun exposure will eventually ram the message home in the form of innumerable nasty little skin cancers that will keep several generations of dermatologists and plastic surgeons in Beemers. A combination of ignorance and sun worship has made Queensland the Skin Cancer Capital of the world. *Numero uno!*

Conducting your activities out of doors on the water gives the sun two goes at your skin. Directly and, again, through the back door by reflection. Even if you've got a roof over your head you still need to "slip, slop, slap" just for the glare.

The basics of this article is how to conceive and execute an effective

barrier to direct solar irradiation, that is robust and flexible enough that you get protection from all weather while wetting a line, as well as at 25 knots going to and from your secret spots. Perhaps it bespeaks a background cruising in yachts, but in my vernacular such things are called "Dodgers". As compared with awnings, which are temporary structures, deployed only at rest, to give occupants modest, short-term protection.

Effective protection from the elements involves 3 features:

1. Primary sun protection.
2. Primary airflow control.
3. The ability to add or subtract additional sun or rain protection simply as required.

To stay comfortable in the tropics it is essential to allow airflow. That means that your dodger cannot be connected to the top of the windscreen. Anyone who has endured a heavy rain squall at sea in a small boat, knows that the time you most need to be in the cockpit considering your options is precisely the least appealing time to be there unless you are very well prepared. Clears, integrated into both the

dodger and the windscreen, can easily create a wind and rain proof observation point where you can adequately assess your own safety, both from the elements and those less well prepared than yourself.

One distilled piece of wisdom from all of the dodger designs that we have done is: don't waste too much time designing them to be foldable and removable because you never will. In our boating life from *Stylopora* on we find that we just don't ever take them down. The dodger at its best is a fixed structure to be left up at all times, as much a fixture of the boat as the windscreen.

Unless you have very deep pockets or workshop skills and facilities that mere mortals like me can only stare at agog, then your dodger will be a metal frame covered in fabric of some sort. Because we have done this plenty of times I eventually worked out a system that helps getting something that looks

good, works well and stays stable the first time around. A bit like the way I have to think when I'm doing orthodontics really.

The subject of dodgers is a big one but these are the guidelines that work for me:

- Never have any sewing in the fabric that goes over the cockpit or helm position. It always ends up leaking and is a good spot for tearing to propagate.

- Have as much overhang outside the top of the windscreen as you can consistent with access forward and clearance for antennas and spreaders. This allows rain runoff to fall outside the windscreen and away from the electronics and stuff on the dash.

- Match the forward profile of the awning to the deck profile of the base of your windscreen, but with at least 200mm radius of curvature where the sides come around to meet the transverse edge of the

The modest clearance between the top of the windscreen and the dodger frame is quite sufficient but no more than it needs to be. The longitudinals line up with the screen panels and avoid the driver's head. The substantial cantilever aft keeps uprights out of the fish working area and provides good hand support underway in B5's spacious cockpit.

