

## Tystie's Pram-hood

There are three vital components in a properly set up offshore cruising yacht:

- An easily handled rig
- An efficient self steering arrangement
- A watch-keeping position that is comfortable and sheltered, yet permits easy access to the rig and self-steering controls.

The rotating pram-hood, that Blondie Hasler and Jock McLeod invented and fitted to *Jester* and to *Ron Glas*, is the perfect embodiment of the third component.

They describe their version and its use in "Practical Junk Rig". However, since they wrote, there have been enormous developments in yacht hardware, including a full range of components for making up frames for yacht spray-hoods and cockpit covers. In 1999/2000, I made a pram-hood for Tystie using 3/4" dia aluminium alloy tube, standard hinge and base components, and acrylic canvas proofed on one side with a coating of polyurethane:



Pram-hood, side view

The pram-hood assembly is mounted on a sliding companionway hatch, but one which does not house into a garage. The hatch is double-skinned, and a 12mm plywood closing piece slides within it. The closing piece can only be slid forward, to open the pram-hood aperture, from below, for security. A hole of 500mm dia was cut into both skins of the hatch, and an upstand built up of plywood rings, 500mm inside dia, 550mm outside dia, height 21 mm, was added to the top surface. A rotating ring 18mm thick is located on this fixed upstand, and is retained by a further ring of 12mm plywood, screwed in place (what did I do with all those 500mm discs of plywood left over? used them to build up the deck partners for the mast). The feet of the frame, and the lower edge of the canvas hood, are fastened to the rotating ring.

500mm dia is a good size for the sole means of entering the cabin of a small boat intended principally for ocean crossings (e.g. *Jester*, *Galway Blazer*), or for a secondary companionway/watch-keeping position on a larger vessel, but is too small for the main companionway of a larger vessel intended for less arduous use. Here, around 600 - 650mm dia might be more suitable. Make a mock-up, and see what size you are comfortable with.



Proprietary hinges

It is easy to bend 3/4" (19mm) tube around a wooden former by hand, if the tube is over-length. The finished lengths of the hoops is about 750mm, and a length of 1 metre of tube can be pulled around a semicircular former, and then trimmed to size.

I bought the base and hinge fittings from Kayospruce, in England, but they are readily obtainable in major yachting centres or by mail order.

The hood is made in three parts. The frame is mounted onto the rotating ring, and tied in position, with the central frame vertical, and the side frames at 45 degrees to the vertical. Then three pieces of stiff paper can be taped into place over the frames, one at a time, and the centrelines of the tubes, and the position of the rotating ring, can be marked onto them. After adding seaming and hemming allowances, the shapes can be transferred to the canvas, cut out and stitched together. The lower edges are hemmed, with a piece of webbing inserted to stiffen the edge that is to be screwed to the rotating ring. Three pockets are added in way of the frames. A rubber bungee loop, hooked onto a peg, is used to maintain the hood in upright position.

As a very useful refinement, a clear flexible plastic window can be inserted into the lowest panel. PVC is commonly available, but does not last long. Polyurethane is better. Note the duct tape patch on my window! If you could see more closely, you would notice cracks around the edges. I am on my third PVC window in 10 years, and I have one more spare in stock; after that, I'll make a new hood with a PU window.



The window

Here is a view of the pram-hood from inside, with the wash-board closed, and the watch-keeper's seat in position:



From inside

All boats are different, but somehow, such a seat should be arranged so that the watch-keeper can sit comfortably for a 4 hour watch, with his/her head centrally under the hood, and with a good view all around. Then, with all the junk rig and vane gear controls led to positions near the pram-hood, the watch-keeper can make easy adjustments with just the upper body exposed to the elements, but remains sheltered most of the time, whilst being able to see, hear and smell what is going on outside.

It's remarkable how free of draughts the hood is, when it is rotated so as to be to weather (and yet, when it is rotated to the lee side, it can be a powerful ventilator in the tropics). Even when the spray is flying, there is some visibility through the window, and it is easy to lower the hood to take a better look at items of concern.

Jock McCleod, unfortunately for him, once made an unguarded comment to the press, and was labelled thenceforward "Carpet Slipper Jock". But it's true - for routine rough-weather passages, foul-weather gear and boots are only needed to leave and to enter harbour. If it's cold and wet, no-one has to be outside. Doesn't that make a whole lot of sense?