

Filling and fairing decks



In the second of our series on restoring a bargain £900 Quarter-Tonner, Rupert Holmes shows how to strip, fill and fair GRP-covered plywood decks

Having made structural repairs to the deck (see last month's PBO) my next task in restoring *Minestrone* was to strip, sand, fill and fair it to a uniform finish.

I'd expected this to be a relatively quick job – after all it was only cosmetic work – but I couldn't have been more wrong, and it took an inordinate amount of time to restore the deck to an acceptable finish. I learnt a lot during the work, however, and next time I'll be able to do it much quicker.

The biggest problem stemmed from one of the drawbacks inherent in the glassfibre over plywood construction of the deck.

As the glassfibre had not been laid down in a mould, when the boat was built the upper surface of chopped strand mat had been filled with fairing compound to create a smooth surface. Over the years this had been painted with many coats of rubberised deck paint, much of which was now coming away in big flakes, occasionally taking lumps of fairing compound with it.

In my initial optimism I had assumed this would be an easy matter to sort out. After removing the deck fittings, the plan was to sand the deck paint away until all that remained was largely sound material.

My tool of choice for this was a professional Metabo 150mm rotary disc sander, which I'd used on previous projects to great effect. As well as a rotational speed of 13,100rpm, this model also has an eccentric action, which I was sure would make relatively quick work of the task if using coarse 40-grit sanding discs.

Again, my optimism proved ill founded – the machine made



ABOVE and RIGHT Stripping the deck paint using the chemical stripper proved frustratingly slow

almost no impact on *Minestrone's* deck paint.

There appeared to be only two other options at this stage – using a chemical paint remover, or a hot-air paint stripping gun. The hot-air gun needs great care if used on a glassfibre surface, as it can melt the laminate just as effectively as the paint, so I opted for the chemical stripper.

Standard strippers will also dissolve glassfibre, and I was disappointed to find Nitromors no longer makes its once-popular glassfibre product.

Some research online found a suitable product from Ecosolutions that can be bought mail order, or from B&Q. As well as being safe for use on glassfibre, it's also water-based, and a lot more pleasant to use than conventional paint strippers.

All the same, using it proved to be painfully slow and, worse still,



the fairing compound came off with the paint! It seemed, though, that I had no choice but to persevere with this route, although I still used a hot-air gun with extreme care to finish off any particularly stubborn areas.

In retrospect it might have saved myself several long weekends of effort by getting hold of a decent belt sander to abrade the deck paint to a sound level.

Failing that, knowing that I now have the skills to repair any small areas of accidentally softened

laminate, next time I'd probably go for the hot air option from the outset, being very careful not to allow the surface to get too hot.

Hundreds of holes to fill

With the deck stripped I had to find a way to plug nearly 200 bolt holes – *Minestrone's* original deck layout had some 9m (30ft) of genoa tracks to cater for numerous overlapping headsails. I planned to modernise the rig with non-overlapping jibs, so these would be redundant.

What did it cost?
£250