



The Hood California dodger installed on the boat.

Fabricating a California dodger

by Mark Hood

In the last article (Jan/Feb issue), we covered patterning a California dodger on the boat. Then we went back to the shop and developed the raw pattern into a workable version for cutting out the dodger pieces and parts. (Refer to our “Fabricating an enclosure” article from the Jan/Feb 2010 issue for instruction on how we join fabric to clear vinyl.)

It is important to build dodgers using the proper sequencing in order not to make the process more time consuming, or more difficult. At Hood Canvas, we put as much detail as possible into the smaller dodger component pieces before they are sewn together to make the dodger. This will become clearer as we go.

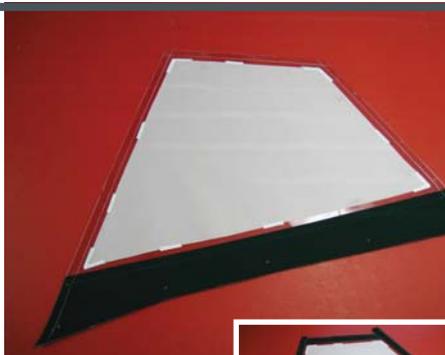
When the dodger is done and is ready to be taken to the boat and snapped on, no tools are needed. There are no raw edges, as it is all two- and three-ply, and no zippers are visible to the customer. This results in a very clean look and a very happy customer.

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CALIFORNIA DODGER: START TO FINISH



1 These are the three forward panel pieces of the dodger with the bottoms and tops installed. There is $\frac{1}{2}$ inch added to the top edge for the seam allowance. Notice the $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch large binder lines drawn on both sides of the three panels.



2 This is one of the two side curtains with the bottom added and $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch large binder lines drawn on the top and two sides.



(Inset) Here is one of the side curtains after the large binder has finished the top and two sides in short order. You will do the same for the sides of the three forward panels. Trim off the large binder overruns flush with the tops and bottoms of all five pieces.



3 This is one of the three forward panels, complete with $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch binding. You will bind the bottom edge of all five panels with this small binding. Also, run a straight stitch at the very top edge of both side curtains.

4 Next, we need to cut out the top panel of the dodger using the pattern and adding a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch hem to the forward and aft edge. Add 6 inches of extra fabric with extensions to each side of the top panel. Fold this 6-inch fabric twice to the inside, so you now have three layers at 3 inches wide. Pin these folded sides out, staple and trim even at the ends, as shown in the picture.



Run two rows of stitching at the top and bottom to complete the side reinforcement. Now add 6 inches of split leather to the aft end of the top panel, and stitch around the edges. Stitch a mid pocket reinforcing patch to the underside of the forward end of the top panel on center. Make the patch 1 inch larger than the finished mid pocket on three sides. Be sure to transfer your match marks from the pattern to the top panel. The top panel is complete.

(Making up the aft and mid pockets are beyond the scope of this article, but the next series of pictures should help show how we fabricate ours. We make our pockets 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, and the ends of the aft pocket should finish 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inches up from the sides of the top panel, so the side zippers can start at the very aft edge of the dodger.)



5 We use two zippers on each side curtain instead of a single zip. The reason for this is twofold. First, the zips can be installed ahead of time on the individual components. Second, it is easier for the customer not to have to zip past the tension of the forward seam. So, you need to install four zippers. Two are on each side of the top panel and two are on the outboard edges of the forward panel. Transfer your match marks from the fabric to the bottom edge of the zippers on all four zippers. Place the side curtain pattern on the side curtain and transfer your match marks to the top and forward side of each. Install the bottom half of the four zippers on the outside of the two side curtains along the bottom edge of the fabric, directly above the clear vinyl. Make sure the match marks line up. The side curtains are done.



6 The aft end of the top panel with the aft pocket stapled on, ready for stitching. Notice that the aft pocket is 1/2-inch down from the forward edge of the leather chafe patch and 1 1/2-inch up from the side of the top panel.

(Inset) The aft pocket ready to be stitched down on the inside. Run your stitch directly on top of the small binding stitch. Notice that we staple or seam tape everything prior to stitching, as it yields a superior product.



7 These are the three component pieces that make up the forward panel, ready to be joined into one large panel. Notice that all detailing, including fasteners and zippers, has been completed.



8 We now join the three pieces into one by overlapping and zipping the center roll-up zippers and stitching them closed at the top. Notice that the zip starts 1 1/4 inch down from the top and does not extend into the forward seam.

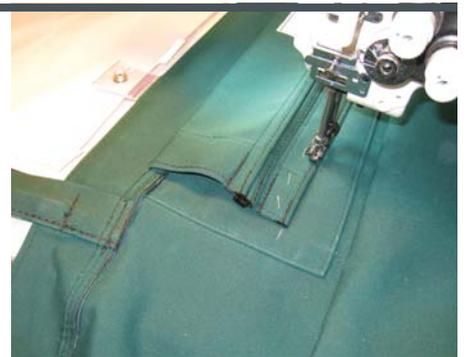


9 In this last step, we staple the top panel and the forward panels together, along with the mid pocket in the seam. Be sure your match marks align with each other and start from the center. Note that the top panel is on the bottom with the outside facing up. The forward panel is on top of the top panel with the outside facing down. The mid pocket is on the top of the stack with inside facing up.



10 Here we are stitching our 1/2-inch hem to join the top and forward panels.

Then we top stitch this same seam. Make sure your forward pocket is facing out over the forward panel when stitching. Also, notice the stitching at the top of the roll-up window zip that keeps the zips from separating, since the zip is not in the seam.



11 Staple the forward pocket down on the inside of the dodger over the reinforcing patch and stitch down, as in the photo. It is extremely important to ease off the sides of the forward pocket by 1/2 inch to avoid diagonal ripples in the top panel when installed. Only the very center of the pocket needs to be tight for a correct fit.

Mark and his wife, Deb, own and operate Hood Marine Canvas and Hood Marine Canvas Training Workshops in Merrimac, Mass. For more information and to purchase the large binder seen in these articles, visit www.hoodcanvas.com or e-mail mark@hoodcanvas.com.