

LESSONS LEARNED LIVING ABOARD

FROM PART 2: BOATS

By J A Rogers



THE COMFORT FACTOR

Comfort becomes very important when living aboard a boat every day. In fact it is one of the most important considerations for maintaining a good attitude among the crew. Unlike when in a slip at a marina where you can step off the boat onto the dock any time, you don't have that option at anchor or under way.

A simple thing like the color of the hull has a considerable effect on the temperature inside and can make a big difference in the comfort factor below decks. A hull with dark colored topsides can make a difference of 10 degrees or more on the inside of the boat compared to one with a white hull. The same is true of deck colors. Slight variations in deck coloring make a huge difference not only on the temperature that gets transferred into the interior, but also on bare feet in the hot sun.

So if you are planning a voyage to the tropics, you should consider a color scheme of lighter colors. In terms of cooling temperatures below, white is the most beneficial for topsides. Because of the reflective glare of white in the bright sun, it is not a preferable color for decks. Colors on

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the light blue end of the spectrum reduce glare and don't increase heat very much. Colors on the red end of the spectrum, such as a light beige which might seem to have no more heat attracting property than a light blue, are in fact quite different. There is a world of difference between walking on a light blue deck and a light beige deck in the hot sun. Experiment with this and you will see that although some color schemes might look good, they become less attractive under way. When cruising in colder latitudes you might want to consider just the opposite. Darkening your hull and deck colors will increase warmth inside.

Another way to help reduce temperature inside a boat is by having an insulated deck. This is not something that is easily accomplished if it is not part of the original design. But it makes such a tremendous difference on interior temperature, it is well worth considering if at all possible.

Teak wood decks usually provide better insulation than bare fiberglass. But the color of natural teak also attracts heat. Some decks are insulated with polyurethane or other types of foam such as might be used to insulate a refrigerator. A little bit of insulation goes a long way. Less than an inch of polyurethane will make living inside like being under a shady tree on a hot day. Without, it will be like being inside an oven.

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Another way to have a cooler interior is to put up canvas awnings all over the boat. An awning is something which is essential to the comfort factor aboard a cruising boat and they are great when you are at a peaceful anchor, but they can cause a rude awakening when a nasty squall comes up in the middle of the night.

Regarding canvas awnings, the opposite is true when it comes to color. A dark color such as the blue many canvas boat covers and awnings are made of is better for shade than a lighter color. At first you might think that white or some other light color would tend to reflect the heat, which it does on the surface of the fabric. But light colors allow the sun to penetrate and much of the heat on a very hot day will just bleed through a light colored awning. While the darker colored canvas may be hotter to the touch, the color prevents the sun's rays from passing through, thereby creating much more shade.

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