

Adrian Morgan



Why ply? Let the slagging continue!

A cold, lonely summer has driven Adrian slightly mad – and a wee bit nasty too

Having in recent months slagged off bearded types, plywood boats and boats that don't go to windward, I reckon I've alienated most of the ever-hopeful few who, having drunk in the glorious escapism of Ms Perryman's peregrinations around the globe, flip the page with a sigh and a "what the heck will he be on about this time?"

Will it be the splendour of sailing the Hebrides in a 70-year-old Vertue, of sea eagle-haunted creeks where only the cry of the gulls and the bark of the seals can be heard against the ceaseless roar and slurp of the breakers,

etc, etc? Nope. Been off this year for just one week; the rest of the time it's been dreadful. Down south maybe they've been complaining about the heat, but not up here.

Maybe some nonsense about Ouija boards and an otherworldly encounter with the ghost of Nelson? Not this column's finest hour, I admit, although my contention that Horatio wore his finest on deck that fateful day because Emma forgot to pack his seagoing gear (making him a target for that French sharpshooter) has been taken up and debated heatedly, I am told, by the Faculty of Nelsonian Studies at the University of West Creek Virginia (poor fools).

Or will it be some long drawn-out boatbuilding saga with a twist in the tail? I've a wooden cold-moulded Folkboat in the yard at present that should by rights have been burnt, and it's providing the raw material for many a long winter month, but I'll save that for later as I know there are scores of IBTC and Lyme-trained shipwrights out there screaming at the editor: "You give that bloke far too much space to plug his business already, when we're out here starving." (Not so, Ed)

Actually, to set the record straight, I reckon I've scared off most potential customers by my honest admission of human failures. Besides, who wants to shell out for a new boat, no matter how fine or exquisite, and find him or herself the subject of a facetious article?

Doesn't leave much. On faithful restoration: I reckon if only the smell of the old boat remains that's a restoration. On varnish: take the surface down to bare wood and lay



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on two or three coats of Blake's Wood Seal. It may smell like an adolescent glue sniffer's dream, but my goodness it sticks. And then what? Slap on any number of coats of your favourite varnish (Blake's Favourite is my favourite for what it's worth – although their Classic is, er... more classic).

Finally, on plywood/epoxy sailing dinghies I'll just say that they are, by and large, far too light, skittish and hugely wasteful of timber. Moreover the grain invariably looks bad and epoxy is the devil's brew. Why bother when it's cheaper and more satisfying (and a damn sight easier) to build in solid timber? And none of that soul-destroying cleaning up and scraping off epoxy dribbles.

My friend Mr Oughtred and other designers who have made wooden boatbuilding more accessible will, I am sure, upbraid me for this. Maybe, but no traditional boat revival can be based on ply and epoxy alone, despite the many stunning strip-planked canoes or flat-bottomed skiffs. Gotta be proper. (Just wait 'til the editor unleashes the pictures of Mr Loftus' new cutter and you'll eschew strip plank for ever.)

As for the gem this month, try this. Thinking of antifouling her again next spring? Hauling, scrubbing, sanding, painting, launching? Leave her in, if it's safe, and give someone from the local diving school a bottle of whisky to scrub her before the season (and again in mid-season). If you work out the

respective costs, there's no contest. If owners of supertankers had to pay the going rate to have their boats antifouled, the price of oil would probably double.

“Plywood epoxy dinghies? Too skittish. The grain looks shit and epoxy is the devil's brew”