

the building of Lunchbox

by STEVE CORK

Some time ago this magazine published the plans for a dinghy, the 'Argy 10', by South African Dudley Dix. I had dabbled a little in boat building previously by throwing together a Phil Bolger 'Tortoise', somewhat modified by available materials and my skill level. The Argy 10 seemed like a good project to move my skills on to the next level as it involved stitch and glue construction.



PLANS started fermenting in my mind for a series of projects involving bigger and bigger boats. Unfortunately, life, which is what happens while you are making other plans, moved on and for reasons best discussed in another story. I decided to move myself and my family from Perth to Brisbane. Not wishing to have to worry about a half constructed dinghy I put off starting the project for a couple of years.

Eventually the move was made and I ended up with a double garage which was a perfect place to build a dinghy, so one day I headed off down to BoatCraft Pacific to order some plywood, epoxy and other sundries. They were duly delivered and I set to transferring the plans to the wood. I remembered some sage advice that said "measure twice, cut once". Well that was wrong for a start. It should have said "measure at least three times, think about it and then do it again..." I made a mistake that was to have ramifications almost throughout the construction process. I failed to read one figure correctly on the plans, every time I looked at it. This meant that I had to judiciously juggle several other

pieces in order to make it all fit. Even at the time it seemed wrong but I couldn't see why.

Nevertheless I pushed on and cut it all out and started 'stitching' it together. Here I ran into lack of experience. While I assembled the bottom, sides and stern, and applied fibreglass tape and fillets, I blithely assumed that it would all fall into the correct shape. This didn't happen, as I found out when I tried to fit the seat bulkheads, only to find that the 'V' on the bulkhead didn't match that of the hull. Assuming my cutting and measuring to be in error I modified the bulkheads to suit and used thickened epoxy to fill the gaps. I used copper wire to stitch the panels together but initially chose wire that was too thin. In the areas of high stress it had a tendency to either snap or pull through the ply.

In the end the error didn't matter much but the boat won't have quite the correct 'V' around midships. Still, I learnt much about the method of construction and it started to look like a dinghy. What I should have done was to stitch in the bulkheads before touching the epoxy.

I had lots of fun fashioning bracing timbers for the seats and bulkheads to fit compound curves with sometimes inadequate tools. Buying tools has, in fact, been one of the great joys of the whole exercise. It is now a delight to be presented with a thing to do, and to be able to reach for the correct tool to do it. I've been able to achieve very pleasing results with 'cheap' tools by being careful and sometimes modifying them to improve them. The most important one is my whetstone for sharpening things. Even a cheap plane or chisel can do good work if it's sharp.

When fixing the braces in place I would drive panel pins through the ply into the timber but leave enough protruding to be able to easily remove them after curing. The bulkheads and seats were fixed in the same way. Each time I would apply a coat of epoxy to the surfaces to be mated and then add some thickened epoxy to ensure that any gaps would be filled. Fillets were shaped with popsticks and wooden spatulas.

When it came to laminating the gunwales I knew I'd need a whole bunch of clamps. Visits to various 'Crazy' discount stores showed that some could be had very cheaply and by the time I actually started the gunwales I had about 25 of them. They're not very good, but then they don't have to be, and I used every one of them. Some of timbers had to be made up from smaller pieces which were scarphed with a plane. I was very pleased with it all when it was done.

Turning the boat over I cut the hole for the daggerboard and then applied a layer of fibreglass cloth for strength. Over this were fastened the runners and the whole lot faired with some thickened epoxy and a light sand. The outboard bracket in the stern was made from a length of Tasmanian Oak for strength.

The boat, as designed, has four watertight compartments for buoyancy. Into each of these I cut a hole so that I could install screw-in hatches after painting. This would let me use these spaces for storage without compromising the buoyancy factor.

About this stage my job disappeared and I was unable to spend any more money for a while so I could only do the jobs for which I already had materials. I fabricated the dagger board, rudder box and rudder, added a mast step and sanded and sealed everything inside and out.

Eventually another job came along and I was able to buy paint. A few coats of exterior enamel and she's looking a treat. Painting with white gloss is a sure way to display all my woodworking shortcomings to the world as it seems to act like a magnifying glass on all the fairing defects. But this isn't a work of art, it's a boat to be used. I'm sure that some would spend large amounts of effort to make it mirror smooth and looking like a million dollars, and to them I say "all power to you". In the mean time mine will be in the water and being enjoyed and I won't mind it taking a few knocks because it wasn't built to live on a trailer so people can go "oo" and "ahh".

In a moment of madness I splurged and bought some lovely bronze rowlocks and plates, and matching screws for the plastic hatches. They look so much nicer than the galvanised steel and chrome ones.

So what have I learned from this exercise so far?

- he who dies with the most clamps wins;
- if you never start you have no hope of finishing;
- much can be forgiven (or hidden) with epoxy resin and paint;
- it isn't brain surgery and is probably not as difficult as you imagine;
- you don't need to be millimetre perfect;



WITHOUT the seat tops to show the bracing and the centreboard box



THE watertight compartments for storage



HERE is a side on view



HERE is my pride and joy. It's taken a while to get this far but I only work on it when the mood takes me

- never throw out scraps of wood, they all have a use sometime;
- while it's nice to have the best of tools you can do good work with cheap ones.

Eventually the dinghy was finished and successfully test-rowed and I was very proud of her. An old friend kindly made a gold plated nameplate which I screwed to the stern. Now she was *Lunchbox*.

After a further period of many months I constructed a mast from aluminium tubing and a sail from blue polytarp, run up by my good wife on the sewing machine. It has a simple sleeve that slides over the mast prior to stepping so there is no standing rigging required to hold it up, and is loose footed. A few simple blocks and some rope and the running rigging was done. I chose to launch the completed boat at the Manly Boat Harbour in Brisbane on what seemed like the busiest Wednesday afternoon ever seen. I was hard pressed to find a gap in the traffic so I could get away from the small beach beside the ramp, and only a very brief sail ensued, but she tacked upwind and floated upright. You can't ask too much more of a sailing dinghy. I was happy.

Since then it has accompanied us on many caravan holidays, strapped to the roof of the car. I've made a variety of trolleys to help move her around, the current one utilising the old wheels from my golf buggy. They may make a good subject for another article.

For those with access to the Internet there are more pictures of the exercise at hwww.geocities.com/lazy_jack/boat.html