

**SPRING
FIT-OUT
SPECIAL**

Revive your canvas covers

Washing, colouring and proofing

If your boat canvas is looking a little shabby after the winter, now's the time to bring it back to life, says **Jake Kavanagh**

Glancing around my local boatyard I can see that many owners have left their canvas covers in place all winter, and I have to confess I often do the same.

Unfortunately, this means the material will have taken more than the usual amount of abuse, and will need some pre-season maintenance. The biggest problem is probably guano, dropped from a great height by seagulls, and around my South Coast berth they seem to thrive on a diet of beer and chips. The acidic droppings solidify on the canvas and eat into the threads.

Equally annoying are algae spores which settle on damp canvas and create fields of green slime. Some lichens can also take hold, and these are very hard to get rid of.

Then there is the constant UV bombardment, which fogs the plastic windows and fades the canvas colour, followed by salt, sand and wind-borne pollution.

All this adds up to having your canvas starting to go 'green' and looking sorry for itself, but the good news is that it can be easily revived. Even better, you can actually protect against the worst of the elements with a waterproof barrier coat.

Expert tips

For some expert tips, we took the advice of Patrick Coghlan from Renovo UK, manufacturers of a range of specialist canvas revivers.

We also borrowed a rather tired sprayhood from Nicky Broadhead, who had removed it from her pontoon-moored Trapper 501.

While the hood was mercifully free of seagull poo, it was still suffering from algae in the stitching and along the seams, and some lichen-like growth at the base.

The stainless steel frame had been in contact with the canvas at key points and so there were some rust stains in the fabric. The two large windows had a multitude of small scratches and UV damage, and were beginning to lose their clarity. Sounds familiar?

No wonder Nicky was smiling as we took it away for cleaning.

Here we'll be concentrating on cleaning the canvas - we'll move on to the windows next month.



STEP 1 Washing



Nicky Broadhead's sprayhood was in need of some serious attention



1 Brush off any loose dirt, and gently scrape off any guano.



2 Spray the canvas and seams with fresh water. This will help the canvas cleaner to penetrate.



3 The cleaner, which has the consistency of a thick shower gel, is used neat and should be brushed on to the canvas. We decanted some into a container and painted it on quite thick with a 5cm (2in) paintbrush.

Sprayhoods can form an integral part of the boat – note how this owner has cleverly used the frame as a handhold and the roof to support a solar panel. The canvas is suffering a little from grime and algae, but can be easily revived with a good wash and reproofing



OTHER WAYS OF WASHING YOUR CANVAS COVERS

Machine washing

■ The domestic washing machine can be used for cleaning small items of canvas, such as halyard bags, winch covers and dodgers. A basic soap powder is safest to use, and the canvas should be put into a pillowcase with the top tied off. This stops any loose hooks or fittings from fouling the washing machine's drum.

This technique also works well for ropes, and the pillowcase stops them fraying on the spin cycle.



Can I use a pressure washer?

■ High-pressure washers have to be used carefully with canvas, as it's possible to separate the fibres, damage the stitching or distort the canvas as it sits on its frame.

The best method is to put the canvas flat on a wooden pontoon, and use the washer there, not blasting the fabric too closely.

The best use is probably where algae has infiltrated the seams behind a window and where it is possible to – very carefully – blast it out.



4 Over a large area it can then be gently worked into the material to ensure full coverage.



5 Pay special attention to the seams, working the cleaner well in with the brush.



6 Don't forget the areas under flaps and other projections. Algae just loves to colonise there.

7 Now leave it for at least 30 minutes to allow the cleaner to loosen the dirt and green algae. If the cover is very badly soiled, then leave the cleaner to work overnight, ensuring it doesn't dry out.



8 Next use warm water and a sponge or soft brush to rub up together, then rinse thoroughly. You can use a harder brush on the seams, but avoid very stiff bristles as these can break the threads.



9 Our first wash had some very satisfying results, especially along the stitching. Nearly all the algae, and the rust stains, had gone, while the canvas itself was looking much brighter.



10 If your canvas has very stubborn, ingrained dirt a second wash will be necessary – and maybe even a third.

STEP 2 Colouring

Renovo is the only company with canvas reviver on the market at the moment. The technology has come from car care products, where the Renovo range is used to restore and protect convertible soft tops.

Although other colours are on the way, there are currently only two available for boat canvases – dark blue or green (unless you buy some from the car range, where you can also find black and brown).

Canvas reviver is something of a misnomer, because it doesn't actually 'revive' the colour – it re-dyes it. To experiment, we used an offcut from an old boom tent in order to see how the product performed.



The pigment is poured into a beaker, and stirred



It is applied with a clean brush in linear strokes, the aim being to complete the first coat in one go. Stopping half way through the job could result in a tidemark. Ideally the canvas should also be pulled taut to free it of wrinkles



The colour won't soak through, so you'll need to 'paint' both sides. Bear in mind that the pigment will also dye the stitching. Once dry (about two hours depending on temperature), it can either be recoated, or proofed. The pigment does make the canvas a little stiffer, but completely transforms it. All the tired canvas aboard can be perfectly colour matched to look as good as new. The next step, reproofing, should keep it that way for a long time to come.

STEP 3 Reproofing

With the canvas clean, recoloured if necessary, and thoroughly dry, we can apply a waterproofing agent to the canvas – and, most importantly, to its seams (a 500ml bottle liberally coated our sprayhood).

There are several well-known reproofers on the market, such as Scotchgard and Fabsil, most of which have been developed for the outdoor camping and caravanning market.

Some, like Renovo Ultra Proofer, contain anti-UV additives aimed at reducing sun damage, the main canvas killer. It also has a mildew and mould inhibitor, and holds any seagull droppings on the surface.



A 5cm (2in) brush is dipped in the fluid and painted on to the material until thoroughly wet. Patrick suggests working from the middle of the canvas outwards, preferably with the hood taut. Also, avoid doing the job in direct sunlight to stop the proofer drying too quickly and unevenly



As with cleaning, special attention is paid to the seams

Working on one panel at a time, and proofing just the outside of the canvas, the whole job didn't take very long. Once done, it was hung up outside to dry, which took about two hours on a cold but sunny March day

Finding the products

The products used in this feature were the Boat Canvas Cleaner (£12.95 for 500ml), Boat Canvas Reviver (£18.50 for 500ml) and Ultra Proofer (£12.95 for 500ml) from Renovo. For more information visit www.renovomarine.com or tel: 01444 443277.

A Renovo trade pack is being marketed by Kayospruce, which contains a complete canvas cleaning and reproofing pack, including a one-step plastic window cleaner. Visit www.sailcloth.co.uk or call on tel: 01489 581696

There are a number of other cleaners for boat canvas, and many more for vinyl. Have a look at:

- www.starbrite.com
The Starbrite website contains some 'how to' videos with useful tips on cleaning and proofing.
- www.holmenkol.com
A relatively new system from Germany, Holmenkol uses nanotechnology to deep clean and reproof canvas.



WIN!

You could win a 500ml bottle of Renovo canvas cleaner. We have 12 to give away, each worth £12.95. Turn to our puzzle competition on page 16

NEXT MONTH

■ If your plastic windows, hatches or ports are getting hard to see through, there are several plastic restorers available. We test them and pick up some expert tips on how to polish clear plastic.



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