

# ON-DECK COMFORT

Providing deck shelter for the crew while sailing and at anchor is a complex equation. You have to trade off aesthetics, function, center of gravity, windage, walk space, and a host of other factors in an ever-changing environment.

Obviously it's vitally important to have protection under inclement weather conditions. This means staying warm and dry through spray, and the odd breaking wave, and wind chill. It's equally important to be able to get out of the sun in the tropics, yet still have a good wind flow to offset the heat. Deck shelter must be strong enough to stand up to a substantial gale and the occasional solid slap of a wavetop that finds its way aboard.

It's nice if there's room to sleep in the cockpit shelter, too. This means a covered seat area of at least 5 feet (1.5 m). Of course, this isn't always practical, but at least two crewmembers should be able to sit comfortably out of the elements on the same side.

## DODGERS

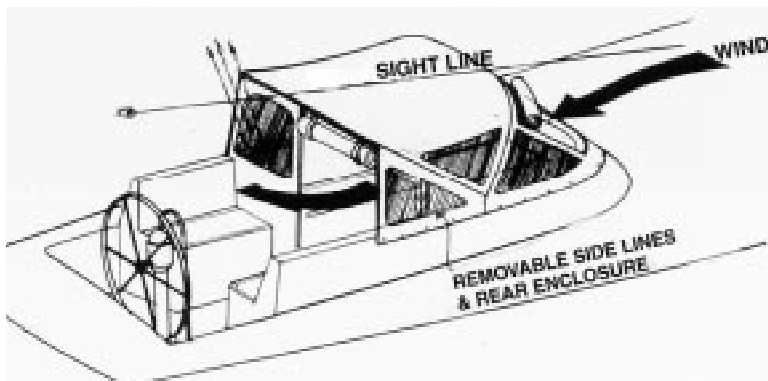
A well-designed dodger can offer dryness and security even in the most miserable conditions. That dry, warm enclosure will yield more benefits than almost any other investment aboard.

You need to think about a number of design factors. First is a conflict between aesthetics and function. Within limits, a larger dodger will do a better job of keeping you dry and warm. Onboard, looking out at the spray or rain, it will be beautiful. But from a dock or the dinghy, a large, effective dodger can be less than attractive.

A major consideration must be handholds when heeled. On large dodgers there will be a fair distance from the back bows to the companionway. In most cases the cockpit coamings will be too far to leeward for good support when working your way forward, so you'll need to have a stiff vertical support at the end of the dodger against which to brace yourself. We use a heavy aft-rope tiedown to lean on when heeled. It's wise to consider support when stepping from the deck onto your seats and then into the cockpit well. Here the back support bow of the dodger, providing it's sturdily made, will do nicely.



One of the things that made this new dodger on *Intermezzo II* so successful was the maximized clear area. Alex Pachos, who built this beautiful dodger, used just 2 inches (50.8 mm) of material at the window seams. We had protection but didn't feel claustrophobic.



The essence of the optimum dodger: Lots of window area, front-opening window for ventilation, removable side curtains (a length of which allows you to curl up on the cockpit seat and stay dry), back windows to seal the forward cockpit area (and low enough so you can see over it when standing at the helm).

## Size

The actual size of your dodger will depend upon the size of your yacht and cockpit and on how you resolve the aesthetics/function conflict. When we purchased our first *Intermezzo*, her dodger was worn out. It was so big and ugly that we made plans to have a small, good-looking unit made that would protect the companionway hatch only. It didn't take but a couple of cold weekends, and the ugly dodger began to look a lot better.



Dodger size is very much a function of how you are going to use it. If you're living aboard you will want at least enough cockpit cover so that two people can sit together. Protection from spray, rain, and sun are equally important.

The upper left photo shows *Intermezzo's* dodger: big, ugly, and very comfortable. At upper right is a very short dodger on one of our early Deerfoot designs: okay for one person to a side, but look what happens with a crowd. The photo directly above is of the 72-foot (22m) *Locura*. Her dodger was five feet long.



At bottom right is my Dad's dodger on *Deerfoot*. Any time you have to deal with a bridgedeck the dodger geometry becomes difficult, due to the ergonomics of bending down as you try and get to the companionway.

Most boats will allow space for a dodger that provides for two people to sit side by side. That means the aft end of the frame must be at least 34 inches (863.6 mm) from the front of the cockpit. Fifty inches (1.3 m) is a lot better. When we were getting *Intermezzo II* ready to take to California from our base in Florida, we extended our dodger 2 feet (0.6 m), making it 6 feet (1.8 m) in length. This completely protected the cockpit area and allowed enough space to sleep on the seats, while fully protected.

The height of the dodger should be such that the helmsman can see over, and peek under it. We've found that 61 inches (1.5 m) off the cockpit sole is a good height for visibility yet isn't too tight on headroom.

### Windows

We like to have windows made as large as possible, with minimum-size tapes. Two are much better than one as they allow better air-flow control (you have a better chance of keeping rain or spray out while still getting some air flow).

Windows should be made of the best-quality material, with the best optical properties. There are a number of varieties and thicknesses. Front windows should be 0.04" (1mm), while side curtains and aft windows can be thinner.

A big decision is which way to open windows — up or down. If you open them so they are held up by straps, then you have the straps hanging down plus the bulk of the rolled window in your field of view. Also, you must roll the windows. On the other hand, if they open down, straps and window bulk are below the field of view and you have the option of just laying the window down.

Sometimes opening a window down interferes with sail controls. But in most cases, this can be dealt with by rolling the window away.



The shorter the dodger in length, the lower it can be and still provide for access to the companionway steps.

These three dodgers are quite small, barely enough space for one person per side.

The advantage that these offer is lower height for better visibility from the helm, less windage, and less area for waves to impact.

They are obviously a lot better-looking, too. This would have been my choice before I started cruising. However, after living with a medium-sized dodger we ended up going as large as possible and ignored the ugliness!



Here's a large dodger on a small boat that actually looks good (top photo).

These removable back curtains (right photo) allowed us to totally enclose the cockpit area on *Intermezzo II* when it was cold or damp out. The improvement in comfort (and morale) from this minor addition was phenomenal! We've found that it's better to use the lightest clear plastic (20 mil) for back windows, as it's easier to store, even though it isn't quite as clear as the heavier grades.



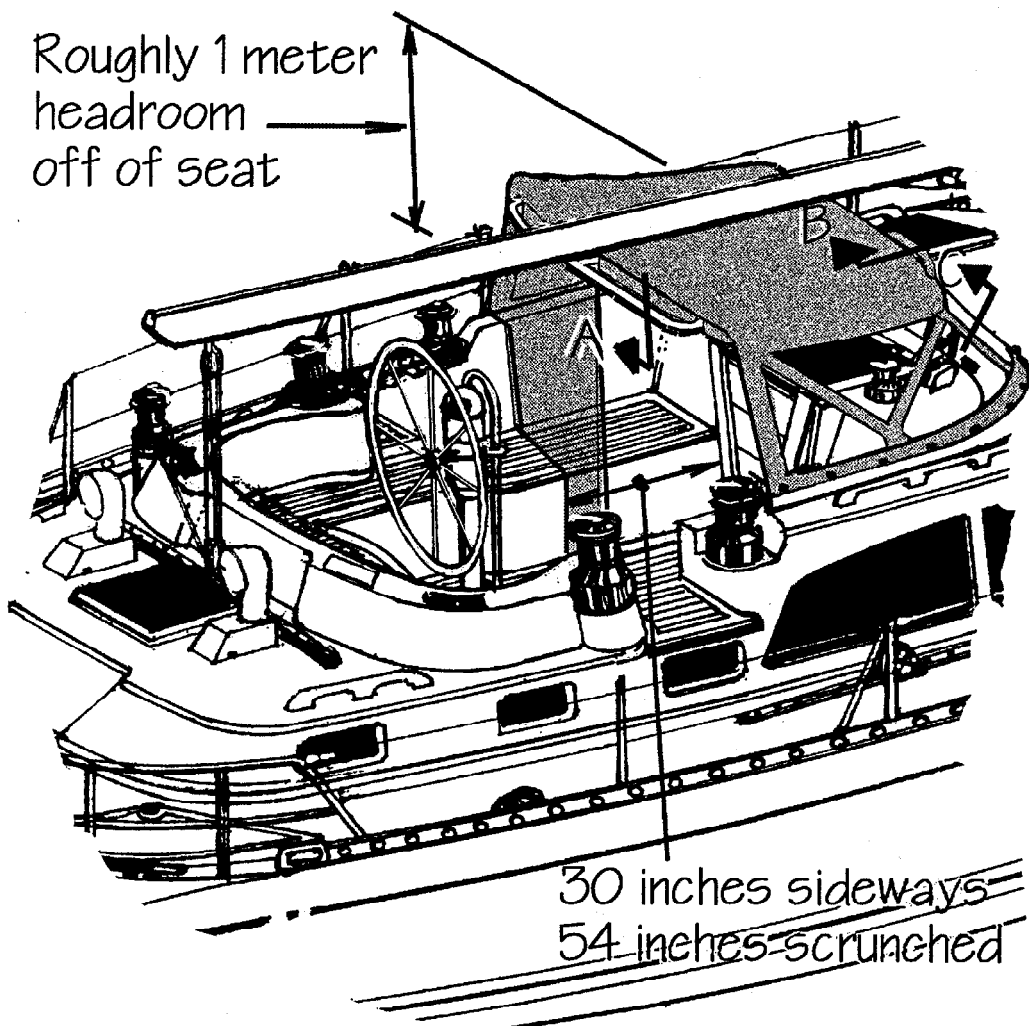
Sometimes a square-faced dodger gives better protection. Note the shade/rain awning extension back to the boom galls.



(Above) The height of the dodger should be such that the helmsman can see over and peek under it. We've found that 57 to 61 inches (1300 mm to 1550 mm) off the cockpit sole is a good height for visibility, yet isn't too tight on headroom.



To minimize leakage through the window zippers, an extra flap of fabric has been sewn to fit over the zipper to protect it from direct spray (above).



Creating a good cruising dodger is very much a detail-oriented process. Don't be surprised if it takes two or three trips back to the canvas company or sailmaker before you have the details just right.

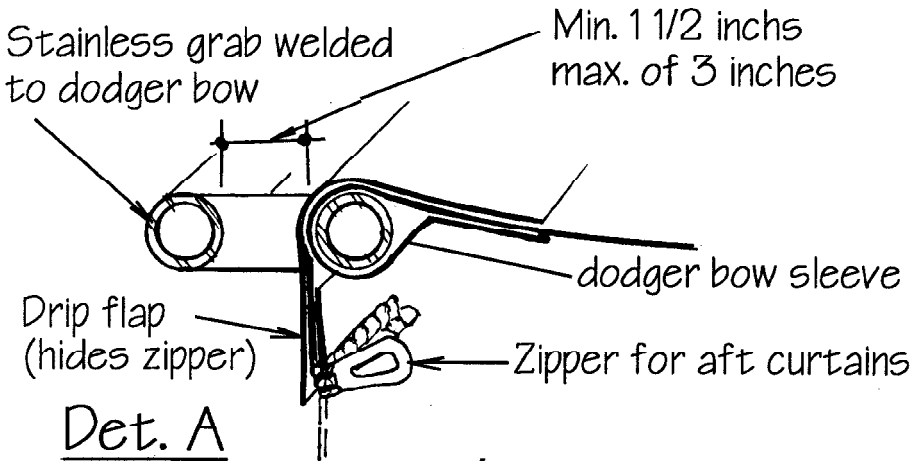
The first design issue to deal with is the length of cockpit to be covered. As shown here, 30 inches (762 mm) is a minimum. Much better is 54 inches (1371 mm). This allows you to sit totally covered to leeward with your legs up on the seat.

The dodger should be as low as possible. But 39 inches (1 meter) above the seat bottom is required for headroom when you are seated. If you have difficulty getting into or out of the companionway, you may want to raise the height or shorten the length of the dodger. Both of these will make the companionway easier to negotiate.

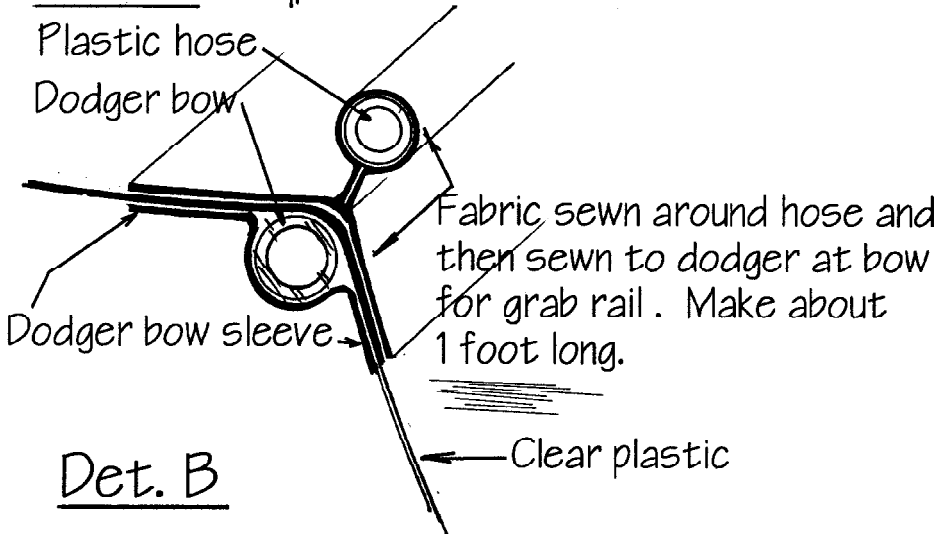
The three drawings on the next page illustrate some details to discuss with your vendor. A grab rail should be added to the back dodger bow, or the dodger should be cut out where it wraps around the bow in several places to make it possible to close your hand around the rail. This gives you a stronger grip than if you were pinching a rail covered in fabric between your fingers.

Detail B is a section through a sewn handhold. These should be run parallel with the dodger bows and sewn on so that the handhold load is transferred by the stitching to the dodger bow rather than having the cloth carry this load by itself. Sewing a piece of hose or strips of window material into the handhold will keep it standing up where it's easy to grab.

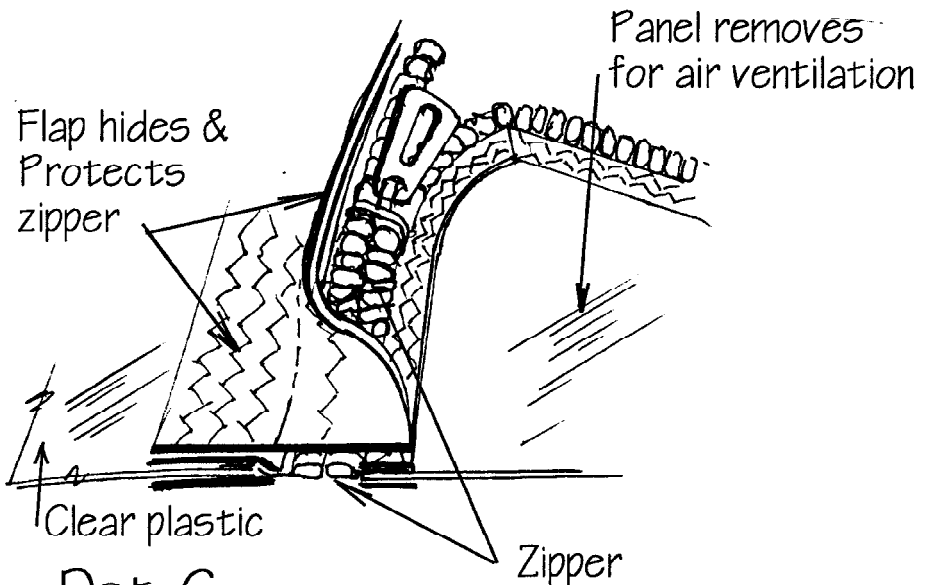
The final detail is of the window zipper cover (also shown in a photo on the preceding page). This is a sewn flap that overhangs the zipper. The flap serves to deflect water from hitting the zipper directly. This reduces drips in the front of the dodger and, if executed properly, makes the front window zippers almost watertight.



Det. A



Det. B



Det. C