# Raising the Dodger on the Catalina 350



C350 Association Technical Editor Bill Templeton

I am finalizing these comments the day of the blizzard of 2017....fortunately here in coastal Ocean County, New Jersey it has been a rain event and not the snow threatened by the forecasters. Hard to believe that when you read this I will probably have the boat in the Chesapeake for the month of June. Last year we had just completed our project to raise the dodger on *Makani Kai* when we left for Kent Island, Maryland Memorial Day weekend. As with many of the upgrades/modifications we have made on our 350, this is another that we should have done earlier...the increased visibility alone makes the effort worthwhile and the decrease in "head-bumps" is a nice adjunct. What follows is a description of the project including modification of the stainless frame, adding to the canvas and replacing the clear vinyl (isinglass). **–Bill Templeton**, pbtemp6816@verizon.net



I am a giant among lesser men, not a tall guy but my Dad always said as long as your feet reach the ground you're OK. With that prologue, the dodger frame on our 350 still was a head-bumper....even worse after I added the teak cockpit grates and effectively raised the floor 1 1/4". From the helm I always had to duck (albeit slightly) to see forward. I admired those 350s (and other Catalina models) with taller dodgers. For many years I wondered if we (Pat and I) could raise our dodger...fortunately she is a capable canvasmaker and I have good basic mechanical skills. The challenges included




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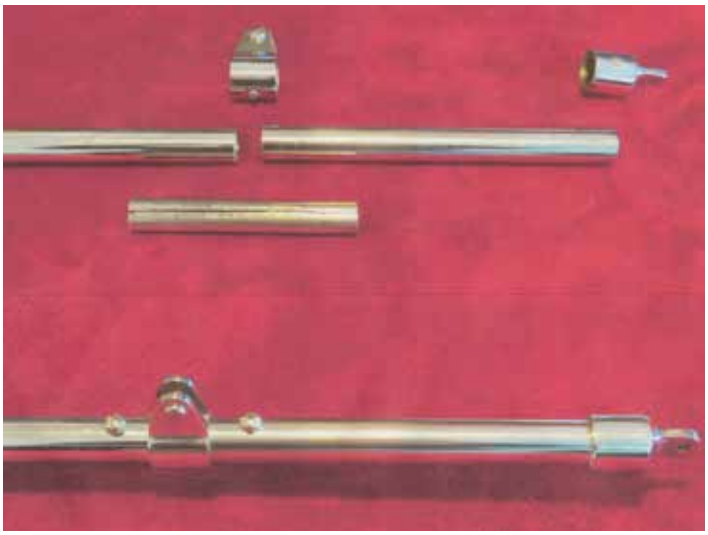
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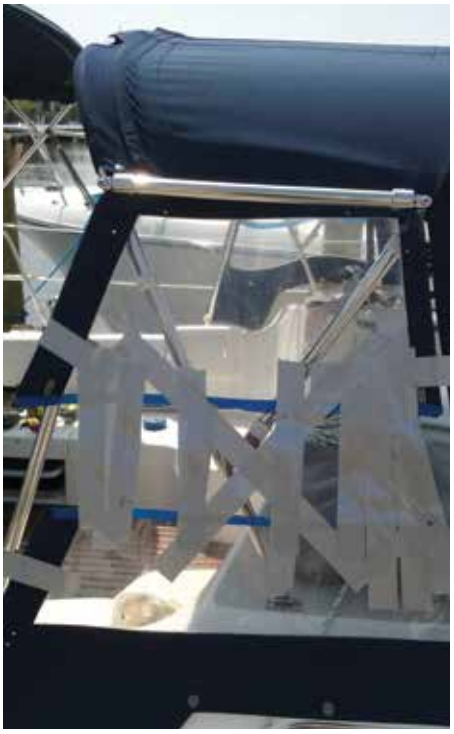
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raising the stainless frame (we decided on 8" to allow the boom to clear), extending the existing canvas to connect top to bottom and replacing the clear vinyl (isinglass). Budget prevented having someone do the job so we had to keep the project within our skill level and we needed to reuse as much of the original dodger as possible.

Many years ago I had installed handholds on the sides of the dodger (Sailrite Grab Rail Kit), these not only provided security when going forward but also anchored the two dodger bows in position relative to each other. This was an important point because it meant we could raise the entire top of the dodger (stainless bows and canvas) as a unit. I purchased 1" stainless tubing for new back braces...cutting one of the original braces to fabricate 8 1/2" extensions. I decide to "sleeve" the extensions with 7/8" tubing inserted in the 1" tubing....it was important that the 1" tubing I purchased had a wall thickness of 0.065" to provide an ID of 7/8". The 7/8" tubing was "thick-walled" to help ensure rigidity to the structure when assembled...the length of the 7/8" insert can vary, I used pieces 6" overall.. I cut the 7/8" sleeves lengthwise to allow a spring-like action when inserted...the inserts were tight enough that they had to be hammered (lightly) into position. I then drilled and tapped the sleeved structure for ¼" SS machine screws after inserting the 7/8" tubing into the main bow. I then hammered the extension into











place and drilled/tapped the extensions for ¼" screws. The main bow was shortened by 1/2" on each side so the jaw slides for the second bow would cover the junction. The sides of the main bow when in place on the boat are not plumb. To help remounting the now longer main bow on the boat I fashioned a "spanish windlass" to pull the ends inward to help match the deck mount plates (slightly increased the bend in the main bow).

Everything to this point was reversible.... now to cut the canvas and clear vinyl ...this is commitment.

We put the dodger on the top frame.... cut through the middle of the window and fastened the bottom portion to the original "lift-the-dot" fasteners. We taped the "beans" out of the two pieces and carefully removed the new "hybrid" piece. We took the piece home to complete the modification in our former dining room (now temporary canvas loft). One of the side panels was cut and taped, the front and center panels were done in much the same manner but were much more awkward to work since they are integral parts of the dodger....not separable like the side panels. Using doubled premade 2" Sunbrella binding we literally connected the corners of the top and bottom portions of the panel (or dodger in the case of the front sections), cut and installed new clear vinyl and new zippers (8" longer). Generous use of double sided (basting) tape helped hold the pieces in position while sewing.

You must be experienced with canvas to even attempt this project. Fortunately Pat, the admiral/canvasmaker, is. You need a machine that can sew through a minimum of 6 layers of Sunbrella and the clear vinyl, fortunately one of the machines in Pat's stable is a Sailrite Ultrafeed. You must decide whether to build a complete new dodger or not. Our canvas was 11 years old when we decided to proceed. I am very fussy with our boat... including the canvas. Regularly cleaned, treated and stored indoors there was only slight color difference when compared to the new Captain's Navy Sunbrella. Overall we felt the condition of the canvas was excellent for its age and that it had another 8 years of life. We had purchased a roll of 30 gauge "Plastipane" several years ago from Sailrite at the Annapolis Sailboat Show..it was damaged in one small area but we were able to work around that. At half price for a "good" (not better or best) piece of isinglass we felt the way we care for our canvas etc. we could get 8 years service. At that time, when we need to build an entire replacement dodger, we will invest in one of the higher rated clear vinyls (probably O'Sea 30 or 40 gauge)

Pictures show the finished product.... increased visibility and headroom under the dodger. We also built covers (Sunbrella Plus) for UV and scratch protection. Our original canvas from Catalina included covers and we are convinced that protecting the clear vinyl added substantially to its longevity. One of the things we will do differently in the future is to make sure to align the twist-lock fasteners for the center panel cover with those in the panels immediately to each side. Also, we used SnapRite buttons to fasten the twist locks instead of standard barrel buttons. The SnapRite buttons have a hole in the center (much like poprivets) which I now have to seal each with a small dab of silicon (in foul weather water drips through each of the holes), the standard buttons are solid. Finally we had to "take a tuck" in the filler piece between the dodger and the bimini, but were able to reuse the zippers.

We started with "headroom" of 5' 6" under the main bow of the dodger.....added 8" giving us approximately 6' 2".....More than enough for the average 6 footer ( my brother-in-law and his daughter...but not his son).....but what about my buddy Joe B who's 6' 5"? No matter how many times Joe is on board I still hear him "hitting" various overheads throughout the boat (but not the main cabin). Let's remember that Frank Lloyd Wright is reported (anecdotally) to have said anyone over 5' 9 is a weed! **–Bill Templeton.** C350 #333 Makani Kai