



Inconspicuous Boat-Cover Batten Sockets

Reviewed by Bill Mills

Much time and thought goes into the design and construction of a good rowing or sailing dinghy. Getting the placement of seats, stretchers, risers, and oarlock heights just right for comfortable rowing, locating the centerboard trunk so she balances correctly under sail, and making sure that every plank line and curve is fair and satisfying to the eye are some of the considerations that come to mind. Often it seems that less effort goes into protecting all that careful work during the larger percentage of time when the boat is not actually being used.

If the boat is to be stored right-side up, which is preferable both from a structural standpoint and for ease of launching, a proper cover becomes a necessity to prevent accumulation of rainwater and to keep the sun's ultraviolet radiation from breaking down the finish. That proper cover needs to be supported in the open middle part of the boat to enable it to shed rainwater, which leads us to the subject of this review.

Usual practice has been to use fairly thin, springy battens or bows made of ash, restrained at their ends at or near sheer height and bowed up in the middle to support the cover. Until recently, the usual means of restraining the ends has been a cast metal rectangular socket which fastened to the inwales and accepted the ends of the bows. This approach has never been entirely satisfactory; the socket's placement on the inboard face of the inwale mandates that the outboard ends of the bows lie below the sheer, allowing a trough to form along the outboard edge of the cover in which rainwater can collect, to the eventual detriment of the cover itself. Also, the metal sockets aren't particularly user-friendly if one happens to lean against or bump them with an elbow, and their visual presence breaks the otherwise fair sweep of the inwale.

All of these considerations were rattling around in the background at the 2009 WoodenBoat Show when our shop had just finished building a 12' Columbia-model dinghy for the NY 50 sloop SPARTAN (see page 58); we were going to need a cover for it, and a means of supporting the cover. The light bulb went on as we stopped to chat with Carter Richardson of East Passage Boatwrights. At their booth was a lovely Columbia-model dinghy that Carter had built, with cover bows in place, their ends inserted into cast-bronze sockets with pins that inserted into the oarlock sockets. The idea was simple, elegant, and free of all the objectionable traits of the inwale-mounted sockets. Their placement on the oarlock pad puts them above the sheer; when removed there is nothing to bump against or to disturb the eye, nor are there any fastenings to potentially split the inwale. Their only slight disadvantage is that they could be misplaced, which is easily avoided with a length of light line.

Bill Mills is proprietor of Stonington Boat Works in Stonington, Connecticut. In addition to his long experience in construction and restoration, he has built custom hardware and fabrications.

The price of these dinghy-cover batten sockets is \$95.00 per pair. Carter Richardson and his partners Seth Hagen and Nick Eide can be reached at East Passage Boatwrights, 257 Franklin St. No. 8, Bristol, RI 02809; 401-253-5535; www.epbws.com.

