

Rail Protectors

Acrylic fabric covers are excellent sunburn protection for varnished handrails, toerails and other brightwork. These easy-to-make covers will keep sun, salt, ice and pollution from undoing your hard won finish.

Story and photos by Jim Grant

There is an easy way to fabricate attractive and durable covers for brightly varnished rails on your deck. Actually, the design that I'll describe is just one of many that could be employed, so feel free to deviate from my instructions as your creativity dictates.

Since thread is always subject to ultraviolet deterioration well before a modern "canvas" cover cloth, cover durability is achieved by keeping all but decorative stitches hidden from the sun. All seams in this project employ a semi-flat felled seam that utilizes a straight stitch hidden under the cover fabric. Double-walled skirts along the vertical sides of each cover replace hemmed, finished edges that are normally created by sewing a fold of fabric in place with an exposed row of stitches. Using brass chain as weights inside sleeves keeps the covers in place but weight alone cannot be relied upon in strong winds so we also utilize mechanical fastenings. These mechanical fastenings, however, cannot mar the appearance of the covered rails nor interfere with free movement around the deck. Where possible, use snaps or Velcro secured under the rail's handhold openings. When that is not possible, your own ingenuity for a suitable method of securing the covers will rule.

Measuring and Cutting

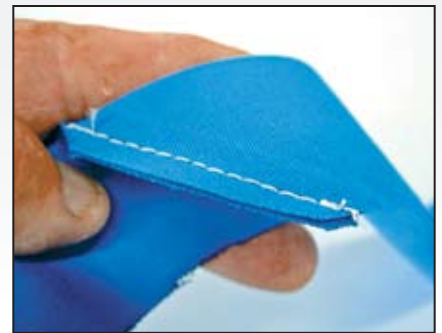
Measure the length, along the sides only, height and width of the rail to be covered. Cut three rectangles of cover fabric: two side rectangles of exactly the same size having a width twice the height plus 1/2" (12mm) for seam



Two side rectangles and top rectangle cut for a handrail cover.

allowance (1/4"/6mm at each end) and the length equal to the measured length again adding 1/2" (12mm) for seam allowance; and one top rectangle with a width equal to the width of the rail plus 1/2" (12mm) for seam allowance and a length equal to the actual length plus three or four times the height of the rail (to cover the rail end). The ends of the two side rectangles will be trimmed later to match the curve of the rail at its two ends. Cut the material with shears, although a hot knife (a soldering iron or gun also works) seals the edges of synthetic fabrics and makes raveling unlikely.

If more than one length of fabric is required to cover the rail, join the two lengths by laying them right sides together at a 90° angle. Run a row of straight stitches at a 45° angle over the two layers. Trim all but 1/2" (12mm) or so of the excess fabric from beyond the row of stitches and then fold the two lengths of material out; they should lie in a straight line. This junction method distributes the seam allowance "bump" along the length of the joined pieces.



(top) Joining two lengths of material together to minimize the bulge. (bottom) The finished fabric joint.

Side Rectangle Preparation

Fold and carefully crease the two side rectangles down their center and along their length. (Tip: use scissor ends held flat to do this.) If the fabric has an obvious right and wrong side (most cover fabrics do not), fold so the wrong surfaces are face to face. Now, trim the rectangle's ends to match the curve on the rail's ends. To guide in cutting these curves, I prefer to make a cardboard pattern of the rail's profile that also includes the handhold openings. Trim the fabric from the open side; the folded side is the longest side as this lies on deck when completed. Note that the side rectangles are 1/4" (6mm) wider than the height of the rail to provide for a seam allowance. Do not cut away the seam allowance at the ends.

Cut two lengths of brass chain a couple inches shorter than the length of the side rectangles. Use either a needle and twine or a glue gun to secure the chain in place at 6" or 7" (15cm or 18cm) intervals along the centerline crease in both side rectangles. This keeps the chain from



Fold fabric wrong sides together then form a crease down the center and using a cardboard pattern, mark and cut the curve of the rail ends.



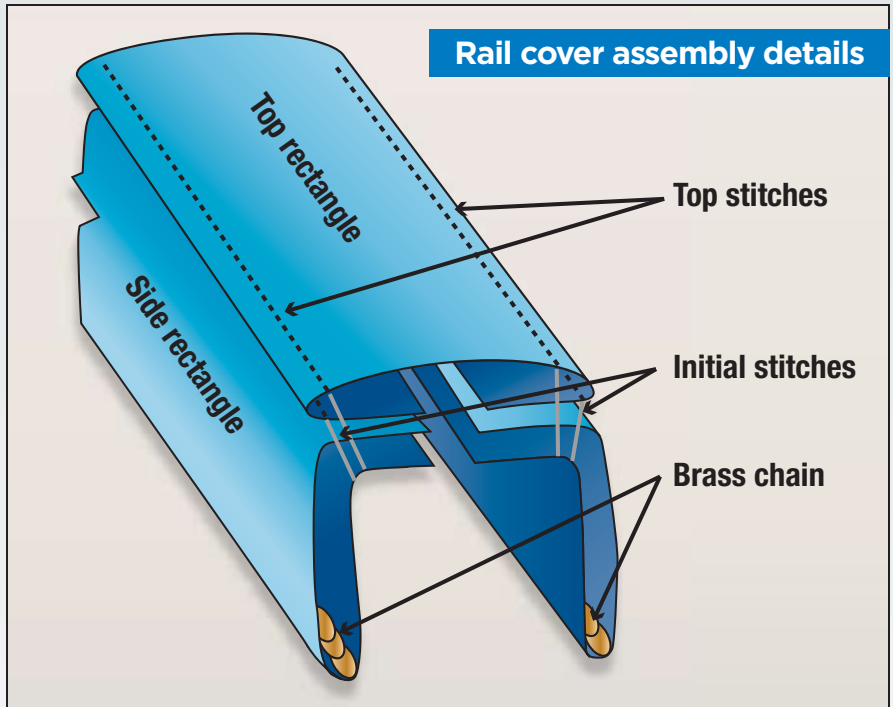
Use a glue gun to attach the brass chain to each sidepiece.

sliding into one end of the cover and becoming hopelessly tangled. The chain is intentionally short to allow sewing the cover ends.

If using Velcro to secure the rail, now add the Velcro strips. Lay the



Two folded side rectangles with Velcro tabs in place.



folded side rectangles flat as shown in the photo below. I use chalk to mark "I" on the inner surface of each one and also mark "B" for bow on each one at the appropriate end. Using your cardboard pattern, mark the location of the handholds, which identifies where to sew the Velcro tabs. These tabs should be about 3" (7.6cm) long and placed in the center of each handhold. Sew Velcro loop along one side rectangle and the hook along the other. Sew them only



Completed cover secured to handrail with Velcro. The top stitch is a nice looking detail.

on the inner panel (the "I" side) of each side rectangle so the stitches don't show on the outside of the finished cover.

Assembly

Lay out the side rectangles so the "I" surface is down (the outside surface will be facing up). Place the top rectangle so its outside (right) side is against one side panel. Line up all edges. Sew these pieces together with a row of straight stitches just 1/4" (6mm) inside the raw edges. Now sew the second side panel to this assembly. It too should be "I" side down. You may need to fold away the already attached side in order to position the top rectangle over the second side so all edges are flush. Sew a row of straight stitches



Sew the second side rectangle to the top rectangle.



Drain holes with two types of locking pins demonstrated.

just 1/4" (6mm) inside the raw edges just as you did above.

Turn the assembly right side out. The stitches are hidden inside the cover where the sun cannot deteriorate them.

Now sew a second row of top stitches along each seam as shown in the schematic above. This adds very little in the way of strength but it does make the cover look quite finished and attractive. Fold the excess material underneath at each end and sew with a short row of stitches. Trim away any excess.

Security Measures

If snap fasteners are preferred to Velcro, install now in the handhold opening of a rail. Place the cover over the rail and chalk mark the location of each desired snap.



Toerail cover mounted.

Remove the cover and install the fasteners. When making a toerail cover, it's often difficult to provide a secure attachment without placing snaps or Velcro where they are visible. I usually find that there are drilled openings that allow for deck drainage at intervals along these rails that can accommodate a locking pin to

hold the cover in place. Place the cover over the rail and mark the location of each of these holes with chalk on the bottom of both side rectangles. Then remove the cover and install a small (00 or 0) spur grommet at each chalk mark. If the rail is a low one, as it is on my Lindenburg 22, use a locking pin to hold it in place. With taller rails, a stainless machine screw serves the same purpose.

About the author: Jim Grant founded Sailrite (www.sailrite.com) in 1972 to supply specialty marine fabrics, component hardware and tools, sewing kits and sewing machines for boaters to build or repair canvas and sails. Headquartered in Indiana, the company has satellite stores in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and Annapolis, Maryland.

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