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More planking, filling gaps

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Sundowner build – 3

And so, to the second layer of planks. The first layer had to be sanded down to eliminate or at least reduce any steps between planks, taking care not to be too vigorous as they are only 1.5mm thick. I wondered at this stage whether to change glue for a more gap filling variety and tried one plank using Soudal 'Fix-all' high tack. This is quite thick in application (with a trigger frame) and squashed into all of the crevices, so it looked hopeful for a while. There is always a but though, and since I chose high tack because it is claimed to get a more or less immediate grab, it would eliminate the need for clamps after the first 5 minutes. No such result here though, under the minimal spring of the plank it slowly became unstuck. I clamped that one down the best I could and decided to revert to Titebond and use it extra liberally to fill any voids (the hull construction is essentially creating a 6 ply 3mm thick shell). I think, of the 2 litres of Titebond 3 I ended up using, approximately one third dripped onto the workshop floor and bench, another third dripped or ran into places in the hull I did not intend it to go, and the rest where intended: it is runny stuff. There is one plank held down with Fix-all (the one on the left in the photo below) and the rest with Titebond...it will be interesting (hopefully for my heirs) to find out which lasted better.

The first layer of planks could be clamped to the stringers and frames as they were applied, but for the second layer, except at the ends by the keel and the 'gunwale' there was nothing to get a grab of. I made an adaptable clamp to assist this, and used it for a few recalcitrant planks with sharp bends but in the end resorted to fine but temporary tacks at about 15mm spacing along each plank. It was a little odd trying to make a waterproof structure and banging small holes in it like a colander. Occasionally some bungees came useful too, wrapped around the hull.

I therefore started the application of the second layer in earnest. The use of tacks meant that I could apply more than one plank a side at a time, so this was quicker, although I found that I had to use more care and trimming of planks to make them fit as level as possible, since I did not want to thin out this layer too much in sanding in case of sanding through a void or similar. It was at this point I discovered an error...I had intended to use the same direction of planking as prototype but realised that I had got it wrong. Two ways to do it and I lost the toss. Oh well, I don't expect the planks to be visible on the outside (see later though!) and the inside is, well, inside.



The planking seemed to go well and I had a routine of three or four planks, twice a day: one session after breakfast and one before bedtime. Eventually, I got to the end and stopped to admire the result, which looked like a boat now, apart from some trimming along the gunwale which as you can see looks ragged in the photo. For this, I used my mini drill (very useful tool this!) fitted with a small, very sharp circular saw blade: it trimmed the plywood really well, and also on one occasion my finger that got in the way, so I now treat it with more respect...



Part of my impatience is that I like building once I thought I had enough information to get started, but I don't stop seeking information as I go. It was at about this stage that I found some photos of Sundowner when out of the water and discovered that there was a variation with the plans for the naval pinnacle that it was based on. My hull looks like the pinnacle...but not like Sundowner! The same photos showed a different stern than was evident on the above waterline photos of the floating boat. This aspect tied in with something I had read about the boat being originally based on a 52 feet long pinnacle (that the drawings were for), yet one account had Sundowner at 58 feet long and others at 52 feet. I decided that 52 feet was the reality, so the extra 6 feet was confusing. These new photos showed the boat at a rebuild decades ago when it seems the extra 6 feet, corresponding to a 'counter stern' added more decades earlier with rounded transome, was removed. Ok then, it was right so far for the very early and modern versions. The other aspect though was that the drawings of the keel on the pinnacle was not faired into the hull (like the photo above), yet Sundowner had fairing. How to replicate this without dismantling and replacing the last few frames and planking? I decided to add more planks, this time not diagonal (the planks would not easily take the bends required at a diagonal). So I added two more layers of planking around the keel with the same orientation but overlapping joints. These were actually quite easy to apply and formed their own smooth curves with clamps onto the keel and tacks at the outer end.



Finally, it was all done, trimmed around the edges and sanded smooth. How to make it smoother, fill the tack holes and any slight plank gaps? Filler seemed the obvious thing although I did toy with the idea of painting it with epoxy resin on the outside, dismissed because of the mess and the fact that the resin is not really a filler. I elected to use a wood filler based on polyester by Soudal (again) and so I gave the whole hull a smear of this filler preparatory to sanding it smooth when hard. At the time of writing this is hardening off in preparation for sanding. For those who have repaired cars using a similar stuff, this is likely to be a frustrating process and involving more thin layers until either it is satisfactorily smooth or my patience runs out. The photo shows the addition of external ribs amidships as you can see. These I also found from that 'hull bottom' photo. They are presumably to keep the prototype on an even keel if it dried out on a harbour bottom and mine serve the same purpose. They are made of the same oak I used for the keel.



I alleviated some waiting time while the glue was drying and for a change working out how to replicate the cabin on this boat. The portholes are an important and prominent feature, so how to do these? That is for the next instalment.