The restoration of Áine

Rejuvenating a Pearson 323

New Cabin Top (Doghouse) Handrails

July 29, 2017 – Aine came with the port side handrails broken and both sides were badly worn with remnants of old varnish. I knew that I wanted to replace them with new teak and figured that while the bottom was being worked on by the yard painter, I could attend to the teak projects. The existing handrails looked small and flimsy, I wondered what the original size was from the factory? Or had they been sanded so many times that they kept getting thinner and thinner?

First task was to measure them, 110 1/2″ long, 2 5/8″ wide, and 5/8″ thick. Next I removed all the bungs and tried to remove the screws. From other P323 owners who had completed this restoration I knew in advance that the handrails are bolted through with no way to get at the nuts. Literally no way to get to them, one of the few flaws the designers made. I tried to unscrew them and get the hidden nut to back off as much as possible, but after a few attempts it was clear that this was futile. I decided to saw the old handrails as close to the fasteners as possible and then snap off what remained, which worked like a charm. With all the wood gone, I grabbed the screw and pulled it up as far as it could go so I could cut off the head. Now I figured all I had to do was push the screw back into the cavity until it fell out and then I could fill the holes with epoxy so I could attach the new handrail using Stainless Steel sheet metal screws.

But not so fast the sailboat restoration Gods tell me. The screws that were originally used must have been 3 to 4 inches long! When I pushed them back they bottomed out against the cabin liner and will go no further. Since there was no way to move or remove them without making a much larger hole in the pedestal, I opted to fill the smaller hole with West System epoxy and some added filler. When dry I sanded each pedestal flush.

I located a piece to teak lumber which was 17′ x 5″ x 1″ rough cut, it would yield 2 hand rails 3/4″ thick and I've have some extra teak for other projects. I spent the next day in the shop just making enough room to cut, plane, and sand a piece of wood this long, it had to be able to go out the front door for both cutting and planing. 2 days later it was finished and I had 2 beautiful pieces of wood. You know you have good quality teak by the feel, smell, and how it works with tools. I put a 3/8″ radius all around the top side and a 1/4″ radius on the bottom side. It felt good in the hand and left a larger mounting and sealing surface for attachment to the pedestals.

I pre-finished the handrails prior to installation. Once the installation is complete I'll glue in the screw-head bungs using waterproof glue, cut them close to the surface, sand the bungs flush and scuff sand the entire top surface and add some finish to the tops.

Installation was easy, I mean really easy… I marked the center of the first handrail and drilled and counter sunk a hole for a 1 1/2″ long #10 SS flat head sheet metal screw. The counter sink hole was 3/8″ in diameter to accommodate the screw head and 3/8″ deep so a teak bung could be installed. I positioned the handrail in the middle of the pedestal and drilled a smaller hole in the fiberglass and attached the screw. The only reason this worked is that there is an odd number of pedestals so the center is easy to find. I attached ratchet straps to the starboard rail aft and starboard stanchion forward. This allowed me to easily bend the handrail for the next pedestals fore and aft. I went fore and aft one by one, slowly bending and attaching the handrail. Once the port side was complete I moved everything to the starboard side.

On the right is a picture of the before and after handrails.

The completed job on the left came out nicely.

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