



FOLDING TENDER

Row it, sail it, motor it, fold it... carry it. The eight-foot Origami Folding Dinghy is nothing if not versatile and she is fun and fast to build. We started on Tuesday and went sailing on Friday *writes Dan Houston*



Origami MkII 8ft: What is she like to use?

The 6-foot version planes with an outboard but outboards is more sedate. Rowing is easy, even for children, sitting on bottom boards. Sailing was less straightforward and on our first trial we could not make the tender go downwind. She is possibly overcanvassed, or we might need to lower the rudder. The leeboards work really well and she sails across and into the wind in a way that inspires confidence. She will carry two adults and two children plus their gear quite easily. She is very easily stored!



Under sail with leeboard and Optimist rig on the River Adur at Shoreham



The looks on the faces of the passers-by say it all. "Are you going in the water with that?" a young lad asks. He's seen this wooden tender taken off a roofrack as a 4-inch-wide collection of planks, carried like a suitcase to the water's edge and then concertina out to become a little boat. I've confidently pushed her into the water off the pontoon, knowing that her little wooden skeg protects her PVC 'canvas' bottom and now I am fetching a little sailing rig. It's about three minutes since I switched off the car engine.

She even looks a little bit classic, with white PVC and varnished wood. She's made of cedar, to be lightweight, with four boards of 11mm marine ply and a few square metres of 550g PVC reinforced polyester. She's held together with about 150 bronze screws and some hefty stainless-steel hinges cut down from a 6-foot 'piano'

hinge. Two natty lengths of bolt rope are for show and the rig is an Optimist rig, bought from suppliers Xtremity.

But the best aspect of this boat is that she took less than four days to complete, from sawing the wood from the cutting list to launching, varnished and ready to row, sail or motor with an outboard clamped to her vase-shaped transom.

Benjy, Robin Benjamin, her designer, restores classic yachts in Southern France. He developed his 'Origami Tender' along the lines of a Prout canvas folding tender, made in the 1940s before the famous brothers became catamaran specialists.

Folding tenders have a mixed following. Many worry that they can easily be torn. In practice they are no more vulnerable to leaks or tears than a rubber dinghy and the PVC won't rot (as canvas used to); it is more prone to long-term UV damage.

The positive aspects of this tender are its ease of erection, literally taking a couple of minutes; its stability, thanks to its very stiff flat-bottomed hull, and its great looks.

And it rows better than a Redstart; this version includes some sheer in the sides, which improves it no end and takes the rowing position slightly lower.

Benjy gave me one day to source the materials for this project and it was an interesting few hours on the telephone. The list included the plywood (mostly 10mm) and various lengths and widths of cedar – about £120 worth. With more time a timber merchant could cut it but we ended up doing that at the boatyard workshop on Saturday. Meanwhile 175 bronze screws (6 x 3/4in and 6 x 1/2in) were ordered from Classic Marine along with rowlocks and the 550g PVC-reinforced polyester came from Kayospruce, at £41.22 for four

metres at 2 1/2m wide. Hardest to find was a good stainless piano hinge but Anglia Stainless' 6ft 2in (1.9m) was £39.92 delivered next day. We cut it by hand and drilled the bolt holes ourselves.

Benjy had all the wood shapes cut in the first five hours. As he cut I sanded and varnished. Using his own instructions (£30.77, easy-to-read, with a comprehensive list of tools and all materials needed) assembly was straightforward; 24 hours' work saw us finished with the rig 'retrofit' taking only another two hours.

After three days of great weather we finished in a downpour, under a sail hastily rigged in the garden. It was quite awesome to take the tender down to the harbour, launch her and have an hour of fun blatting about on the motor; you can steer her by leaning from side to side!

Over page we show you how she was built.



The ply and cedar pieces sawn and ready to assemble...



And how it all looks out on the water

HOW SHE WAS BUILT

Origami is a tender that you can build in a very small space, with basic tools, following the easy guide that comes with the plans



Under sail the little boat is very stable though she did not go downwind on our first sea trials



1 We went to a timberyard and bought the cedar and ply to cut into the basic sizes for Benjy's cutting list.



2 Benjy downloaded his plans and began the work of sawing up all the wood into the patterns for assembling the tender.



3 The keel, stem and sternpost (note knee) are all glued into one piece, in traditional style, as the boat's backbone



4 The dinghy sole, or bottom boards are of 11mm ply bolted through 4 and 6in (10 and 15cm) stainless hinges, four per side.



5 These are the hinges cut out from a plain stainless-steel piano hinge from Anglia Stainless, then smoothed off on a belt sander.



6 The carry holes get rid of some weight and are useful for carrying the dinghy; the boat will be wider than this photo shows.



7 Offering up. While Benjy was cutting and putting it all together we varnished everything with Epifanes Rapid Clear.



8 Ready for the covering. It's important to set her up right for this: note blocks, and two of 20 clamps (overnight from Screwfix).



9 Taping up, with strips of PVC polyester. Her boards are held up aft by two swing-out legs to prevent collapse on capsizes.



10 Stainless-steel staples (10mm) hold the tensioning tapes in place; these give her her shape before covering.



11 We used clear silicone sealant as a waterproof beading to seal the staples, then draped the covering half over.



12 The cover was fully put on, again with more silicone in way of staple runs. We were racing the rain at this point!



13 We had more than enough PVC polyester canvas to cover the boat. It may come in useful if we ever need a repair.



14 With the 'bottom' stapled on we trimmed off the excess with a sharp knife before screwing on the covering pieces



15 With the last transom back screwed in place we sewed on the bolt ropes: buff polyester Posh from English Braids.



16 The sailing rig requires a tabernacle on the keel and a thwart cut into the bow boards and tensioned back to the keel.



17 Our Oppy gudgeons will get in the way of the outboard and eye bolts will be better. The rudder hangs a little high.



18 The ingenious leeboard is so easy to fit and use and it works, helping Origami to stay on the wind. Voila, she's done!