



Habitent Sirocco

David Pugh welcomes the opportunity to test Habitent's new, narrower Sirocco boat tent

Testing a cockpit tent in a week with no rain forecast initially seemed like a bad idea. However, as my wife and I were on holiday I had plenty of time to fiddle with new boat toys – a rare state of affairs, and well worth exploiting.

I admit I was already well disposed towards the Habitent, having experienced the original version on Ben Meakins' Impala Polly. At the time, however, it was too wide to fit the slender beam of my Contessa 26 Red Dragon. When the company came up with the narrower Habitent Sirocco (RRP £445 plus P&P), I jumped at the chance to test it.

The Sirocco is intended to fit stern measurements of 1.0m to 1.6m, ideal for the tapering lines of the Contessa. Red Dragon adds some extra challenges, namely a full-width traveller that runs across between the pulpit stanchions just abaft the cockpit

coaming, making it impossible to bring a tent down to deck level without slits in the sides.

Like most tents, the initial experience with the Sirocco is somewhat daunting. A selection of poles and an initially shapeless mass of nylon make for an unpromising start, but the waterproof instruction sheet is sewn into the seam of the bag and is easy to follow. The difficult bit is translating it to your own deck layout – a trickier prospect than pitching a tent in a field – but once you've got it all worked out, it has been made as easy as possible.

The main supports are a frame to extend the back of the tent, your

coachroof or sprayhood, and a choice of loops so that you can raise the centre with a halyard. Other poles are provided, but you don't have to use them. I fitted both the fore and aft frames to the canopy, then slotted the aft frame between the cockpit coaming and the traveller. Moving the traveller to one end of the track shifted the boom neatly out of the way.

Unlike the original Habitent, the canopy of the Sirocco can be pulled out beyond the frame, so that you can fit the frame inside the cockpit and the canopy outside, for example. This wasn't necessary on Red Dragon, but makes the tent able to fit a wide variety of boats including half-decked day-sailers.

At this point, I realised that although the Sirocco is narrow, there's plenty of length for long cockpits or, if you fit the frame at the transom, to cover the aft deck. On Red Dragon, this means that the tent extends right over the sprayhood and the liferaft almost to the mast – not particularly useful, but not a problem either. The edges of the canopy are held down with a selection of bungee loops, which worked really well

with our existing cockpit cover fixings, while tension is applied where appropriate using webbing straps. These have quick-release buckles, so once set shouldn't need adjusting each time. Longitudinal straps in the skirt of the tent pull the remaining fabric in neatly, and once erected the whole tent is secure and should stand up to most cruising conditions. Habitent suggest you take it down if a gale is forecast.

All the loops and straps are supplied, and a nice touch is the two-way zip in the rear panel which allows you to zip it up above and below the tiller.

In use, we found the tent a good way of stopping a chilly northerly coming down the companionway, and it provided useful shade in the day while keeping the chill off in the evening. There are plenty of panels which can be zipped and rolled up, providing a range of entry and exit options. These are built in three layers, giving you the option to have a clear window, a mosquito net or complete privacy.

I'm impressed. For a small boat it adds useful extra space, and once you've got past the initial set-up it's easy to disassemble and re-erect. I'll have to take the manufacturer's word for it on the waterproofing – but Ben's Habitent keep the rain out, so there seems no reason to doubt them.

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The tent packs down to a small roll, easy to stow under a bunk

