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DECK COLOUR and REPAIRS

Toppers are made of polypropylene, a very tough plastic (skateboard decks are often made from polypropylene and they need to be tough!). There are stories of Toppers being crashed at high speed into walls and surviving better than their helms!

When you sail a boat made of wood or Glassfibre Reinforced Plastic (GRP) and have a small 'coming together' with another boat you will find you have some work to do, not so with a Topper. It does tend to make Topper sailors a little less cautious than they should be because their boats just bounce! The plastic will snap but only when it is subjected to a big force, especially when it's cold. The classic one is when the lip of the boat is overhanging a jetty and then the sailor walks over the deck!

However there are things you can do to keep your deck looking fresh and there are ways of repairing splits.

FADING

All plastics are affected by the Ultraviolet (UV) in the sun and the deck mouldings do fade, some more than others. Red, Dark Blue and Light Blue seem least affected. Grey and Yellow seem to be most affected but this is a generalization only. In the worst case the surface goes chalky and you can scratch the surface with your nail. If this is the case it is possible to remove the surface with a fine brass wire brush but do bear in mind that the surface texture might well be removed. In the best case the surface simply becomes lighter / white. The answer is to:

- Really clean the surface (I use a power wash)
- Let it dry thoroughly
- Melt the surface with a hot-air gun (paint stripper) This is very scary but you cannot melt right through because it's 6mm thick. The trick is to set the stripper to maximum setting (really!). Then pass it over the surface of the deck as close as you can without touching (maybe 1mm). Move at a speed that re-colours the surface without sticking around too long!

BRUISING

Some colours show this worse. Red and the lighter colours show bruises the least and are easy to rectify. Purple and pink are the worst and hardly work at all. If you are going to try purple or pink then don't expect great results although there can be some improvement. Bruising happens when the plastic has been bashed. It also looks white but usually only in the area it has been hit (so, often, it is the edge of the deck). The difference to faded decks is that it's much deeper into the plastic so needs a different technique:

- Again really clean the area (you don't want dirt to be melted into the surface)
- Let it dry thoroughly.
- Heat the plastic with a hot-air gun or hair dryer. The idea here is to get the plastic heated to the full depth of the bruise. It takes time for the heat to travel through so use a lower setting on the heat gun, use it 50mm away from the surface and for a longer period. Move the gun around so you are heating the surrounding area as well as the bruise. You might even occasionally remove the heat for a few seconds. Watch out for tell-tale signs of overheating - the surface can bubble.
- Come back to the bruise much later on if it reappears, strangely it often works the second time.

I know this all sounds scary, but do a trial somewhere that is inconspicuous. When it works you will be amazed at the results.

REPAIRS

Toppers cannot be glued. Polypropylene is a 'waxey' plastic and they just don't stick. The good news is that they can be welded. It's not a DIY job because it requires a special (and expensive!) welding gun. Any good Topper dealer should have one but I have sent people to the local car repair specialists because they use a similar tool to weld plastic bumpers. Just remember to tell them it's polypropylene.

The weld will last about 5 years and will be very strong over that period but ultimately is not as good as the original plastic.

The deck to hull join is a particularly effective weld so don't try silicon here because it just doesn't work.

Dave Cockerill