

Gear On Test

Kiwigrip Non-Skid Deck System

£29.95

If you're anything like me you've gazed up at an Artex stippled ceiling at some point and wondered if a similar two stage approach might work to create a non-slip deck covering for boats. That's to say spreading a very thick paint or filler, then using a special tool to add peaks and troughs to the surface. I've always thought that such an approach might be a more suitable replacement for worn out moulded-in non-slip than the ubiquitous and rather low tech 'paint with a handful of sand chucked in it' alternatives that so many of us have plumped for, for so long. Staying on one's feet on a decent non-slip deck is one of the least talked about safety considerations for boats, but one of the most important in my book.

Kiwigrip has been around for a couple of years now in the UK, but has been on the market for over a decade in its original New Zealand where it's used as a coating for the concrete around swimming pools as well as for yacht decks. The packaging on the tin gives a telling glimpse into the world of Antipodean marine product marketing with a racing yacht on the front in the middle of an almighty spinnaker broach, and bow men still firmly rooted to their positions, as if their feet have been glued there, despite the deck rolling over way past 45°. If this is a product that does what it says on the tin then it's something I want spread on the decks of every boat I own.

The product is an acrylic, water

based gel polymer substance of a similar consistency to Greek yoghurt. It is simply applied to the deck using any kind of old brush or flat spreader, in small areas at a time, left for a few minutes, then rolled out with a hairy plastic roller, which is supplied with the product. Now comes the part that knocked my socks off: unlike all its competitors, KiwiGrip is 'user configurable' to an extent. That is to say, the more times you back roll the gooey gel, the sharper, taller and more aggressive the pointed peaks in it become. This means that on parts of the boat you need to be highly non-slip, like the coachroof under the boom, you can roll four or five times to get a super spikey finish. These parts can be gradually blended into other parts

that are rolled fewer times, as a decrease in pressure applied to the roller also smoothes the peaks. For example, many users only double roll the cockpit seats, because they want them to be kinder to fleshy hindquarters or expensive Goretex oilies. Paul Cleverly of UK distributors Vitesse Marine has a sample board that shows not just the four factory colours, but also four examples of the different levels of non slip attainable with the product. The mildest, least rolled sample has a bobbly consistency not dissimilar to many of the factory non slips that GRP decks pop out of their moulds with; ideal underfoot for light cruising duties, easily cleaned and not unpleasant to run a bare hand over. Then, as you move over to the more aggressively



1: You can apply the product with anything from a thick brush to a flat scraper. It's a simple matter of getting it out of the tin and spreading it on.
2: Then roll to taste with the supplied roller. Wait until it gels a bit, then roll it again if you want a super spikey finish. Tackle 2-4ft² areas at a time.

rolled end of the card, you get to the kind of non-slip that would take skin off a rhino's rump, if it were unlucky enough to lose its footing on your boat in the first place.

It's rare for me to get excited about any kind of above the waterline marine coating; they're all the same, you open a tin, paint it on and don't really get to know how good it is until 10 years down the line when it hopefully hasn't deteriorated too badly. But this seems, on first acquaintance, to be something a bit special in a tired market. You see, apart from its aforementioned safety benefits, KiwiGrip seems to have an ability to turn round a tired looking deck and boat like few products out there.

Tony Preston of Tony Preston Yacht Services, walked me around a couple of aged Sadlers in his Yard at Wiccor Marine, Fareham. He'd given both of them the KiwiGrip deck treatment and they had been transformed. For a start, the one with a one colour deck looked initially like it had a factory gelcoat deck finish. Both of them had crossed that magical divide and looked like lightly used original boats rather than tarted up old ones and I didn't need Tony to tell me that's something which is both hard to achieve and worth bundles of notes when it comes to resale time. I can imagine what their decks were like before, having had enough 70s and 80s cruisers of my own with moved deck gear and badly repaired impact damage and years of filler and paint clogging up the factory non slip. KiwiGrip seems to promise making good all these things, because it's so thick it fills in and replaces factory non-slip and previous paints and finishes, though any loose paints have to be removed first. Indeed, it's so thick,

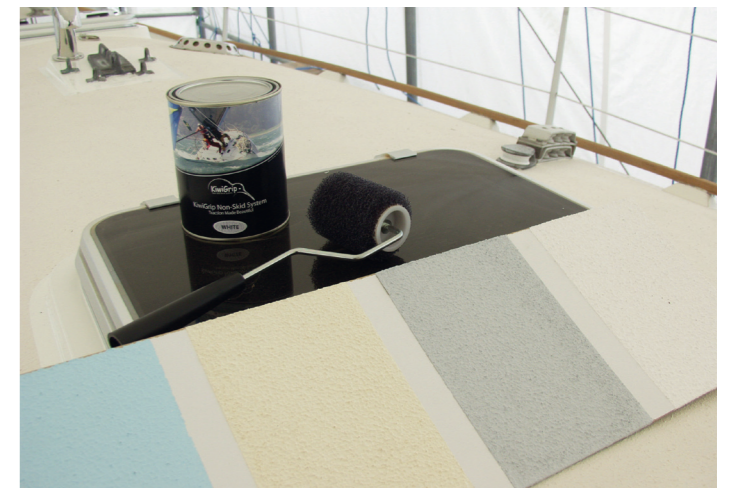
Tony advises masking all screw holes of any removed deck gear, because the material fills smaller holes with its homogenous surface, leading to doubt as to where some fittings went.

A close inspection with a thumbnail found a few voids in the peaks of one of the finishes, but these collapsed, providing a sharp edged crater just as grippy, so my only real concern is that such craters could trap dirt over time. It comes in four fairly light colours, though the distributors will colour match other shades for a nominal fee. Dark colours, such as dark grey or black, are not available as it melts at about 60°C, though this tendency means it can be easily removed by peeling with a hot air gun and only the truly certifiable would want a black deck finish in my view. The distributors claim that it's not possible to roll peaks into it that are so tall and slender that they snap off in use, but they would say that wouldn't they? I'd advise not going too mad with the back rolling or practice with a test board first for this reason.

Be aware also that 1 litre only covers about 2m², because it's so much thicker than ordinary paints. A 4ltr can retails at £105.69. This makes it cheaper (along with being much easier to apply) than the cork/rubber type stick on non slip mats and, depending on coats required with traditional paint, not much more than refinishing with non-slip paint.

We're planning a comparison test of a variety of non-slip finishes over the summer, so it's a tentative thumbs up at the moment.

If it does everything it looks as though it will and durability is good, The more traditional solutions have a fight on their hands. **JF**



CONTACTS

Available at increasing numbers of chandlers, but contact **Vitesse Marine** on 01329 232360 for your nearest stockist.

FOR

- Unique user configurable level of non-slip
- Can look like factory finish
- Covers a multitude of sins

AGAINST

- Could voids or craters trap dirt?
- Could it lack durability if rolled too aggressively?



Top to bottom:
A 1980s Sadler 34 is transformed. The factory shades are all pale. Some hardware, like hatches, look better masked off. Cleats and winches are best removed and refitted.

