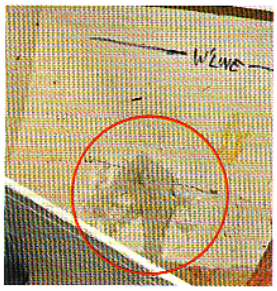
10 'Buy you time' repairs

1 Cushion stamped against the hole

QUICKEST

As the boat was lowered and the water began to gush in, my first reaction was a sudden rush of adrenalin. I grabbed a bright orange cushion, which has always lived in the forepeak of the Crash Test Boat, and held it over the hole with my boot. This took a second and greatly reduced the flow of water. It was a major confidence boost and definitely the quickest quick fix.

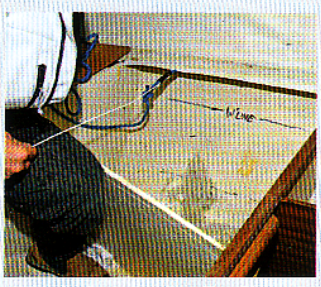


It might not look too bad but we took on 2,000 litres of water in just 7-8 minutes

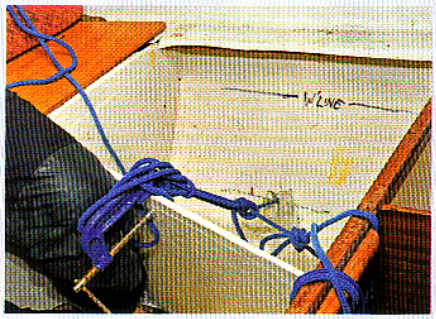
ABOVE: It's about as low-tech as a repair can get. LEFT: It's fast and effective but what's your next move?

2 Flat plywood board

This involved using a coat hanger to push a loop of line out through the hole, which a crewman on deck snagged with his boathook. He then inserted the line through a pre-drilled bunkboard, knotting the end to hold it in place, before I hauled the board from inside the boat, tight against the outside of the hull. A G-clamp proved invaluable, providing a convenient anchor to tension the lines in this and other methods of stemming the flood. It took a couple of minutes to implement and the results weren't spectacular.



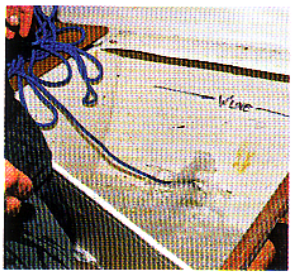
We poked out our hauling line using a straightened coat hanger



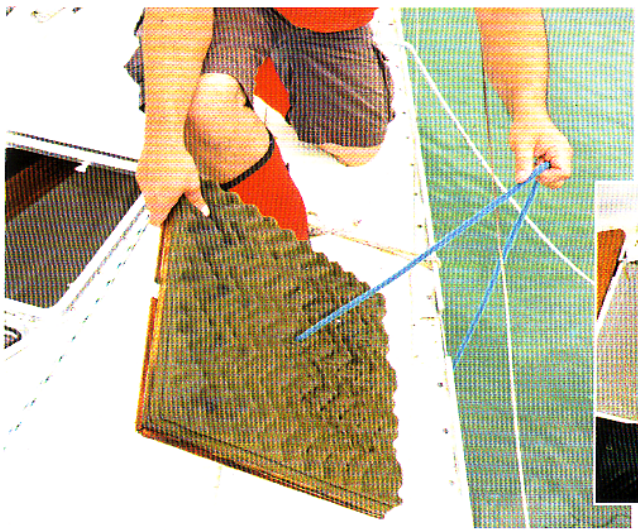
ABOVE: Kieran snagged the hauling line with a boathook and tied on the board. LEFT: Even hauled in tight, this repair leaked quite badly

3 Flat engine room board

A piece of engine room hatch, lined with sound-proofing sponge, was pre-drilled as the Mark II version of the flat plywood board solution. Once again, a loop of line was pushed through the hole, which Kieran, on deck, snagged with a boathook and inserted through the board's pre-drilled hole. It took the same time to deploy, but was much more effective.



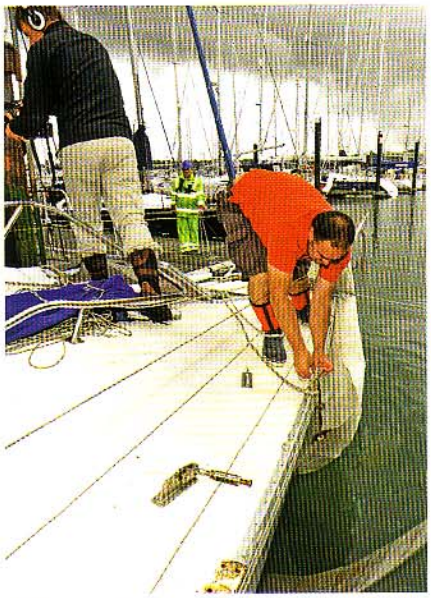
LEFT: We could have stamped a cushion over the hole while running the hauling line



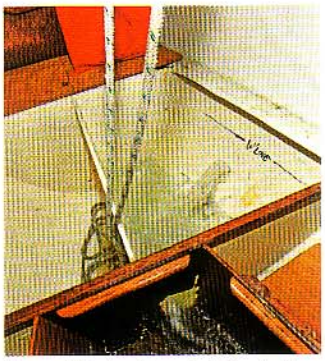
LEFT: The hauling line was threaded through the board and fastened with a stopper knot. BELOW: The result was much more effective

4 Fothering a sail

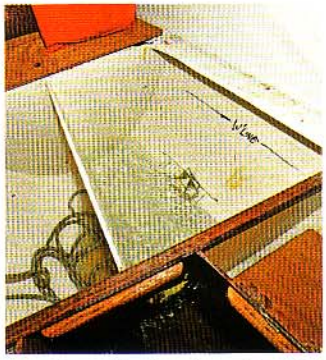
Tried and trusted by Admiral Nelson after cannon ball damage, this involved wrapping a sail around the hull, leech forward as it's smoother. It was not quick. Lines needed attaching to each corner, then it needed a boathook to sink the sail under the hull's knuckle. Twists needed to be removed before see-sawing the sail into place and securing very tightly to the toerail. Sadly, due to the sail's built-in camber, it 'pulsed' against the hull, proving a decent fix one second, awful the next.



Fothering a sail took a long time and any sail is fundamentally ill-suited for the job



The sail 'pulsed' against the hull, making a bad repair one minute...



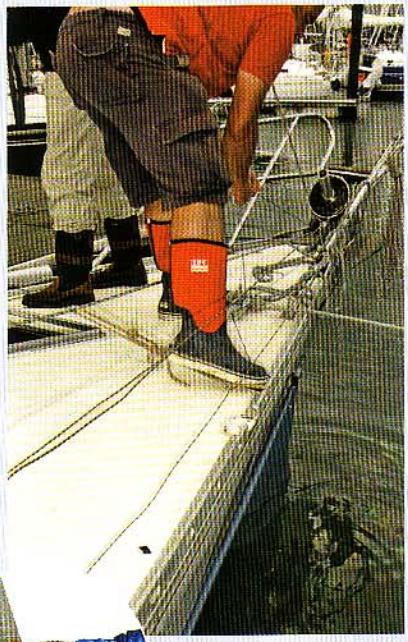
... and a pretty decent one the next. The result isn't worth the time

MOST EFFECTIVE

5 DIY collision mat

I tried to get a purpose-made collision mat, priced at £622 ($999), from an American company, but they never replied, so I spent £16.99 on a sheet of damp course membrane and £17 on four Strong Grips. If not pre-prepared, it takes five minutes to assemble, longer than the sail. It also needed to be prodded under the hull's knuckle but the flat, smooth material was see-sawed into place more easily than the sail and sat flat on the hull, stopping the torrent of water almost completely.

STRONG GRIPS
Price £8.50 for two
Contact
Outboard Covers
Tel 020 8874 3251
Website www.outboardcovers.co.uk



Once in place, the fothered sheet proved a perfect fix

Strong Grips were taped to each corner

ABOVE: The assembly needed shoving through the hole. LEFT: It's ready in seconds and it's appealingly simple

It reduced flow significantly but opened up splits around the hole

6 Lifejacket wrapped in a towel

This idea really appealed to me – fast and ingenious. At least, it might have been, with a bigger, rounder hole. As it was, I needed to stuff the assembly through the hole with an oar, making the hole bigger and the gush of water worse. Once in place, I fired the manual inflator and the flood slowed considerably. However, the inflation did open splits in the hull and water seeped relentlessly through them.

ABOVE: The mangled brolly proved useless. LEFT: It worked for Mary Poppins, but not for us

7 Umbrella

Always a bit of a long shot, this one, but worth trying if only to challenge the old truism about the two most useless things aboard a yacht being a retired navy officer and an umbrella. This one was a giveaway brolly from a newspaper promotion. I tied a line to the tip (to make sure the umbrella didn't sink into the marina) and then prodded it through the hole. When I tried to open the brolly, the handle fell off inside the hull. Looking at the shreds caused by the splintered GRP, it wouldn't have worked anyway.

How did the Subrella fare? Turn over to see ➔

8 Subrella

This is a purpose-made emergency collision 'patch' – a sort of hi-tech 'umbrella'. As before, a line was tied on to prevent loss before it was thrust through the hole. Because of the size of the Subrella and the relatively small hole, it had to be hammered through with the blunt end of an oar. The hole was enlarged as a result but, once deployed with its safety line secured to the G-clamp, it slowed the flood to a level that would definitely buy you time. Alas, it is no longer in production and the patent belongs to a now defunct company.

The Subrella slowed the flood of water

The Subrella was too big for our hole and needed forcing through with an oar

The Subrella is no longer made. Production volumes were not high enough to bring down costs

The idea is sound enough, quickly and easily prepared, but how does it work in practice?

9 Towel in garden refuse bag

This idea aimed to exploit external water pressure by forcing a bagged item through the hole so that the water pressure could force it back against the hole, sealing it. Unfortunately, the bag shredded as it was pushed through the jagged hole, leaving the towel prising the hole open and allowing water to gush in. It wasn't an encouraging result and we perhaps overestimated the water pressure.

The bag shredded, the towel opened the hole

10 Sail in sailbag

Again, the principle was to push the bag through the hole then stuff the sail into the external part of the bag so the water pressure could push it back onto the hull. Again, the idea overestimated the water pressure and simply forced the GRP shards apart and opened the hole. The ingress can only be estimated from what was flowing out of the bulkhead, but it didn't look at all encouraging.

ABOVE: Another simple idea, but did it work?
LEFT: No. Again the sail simply opened up the hole

So you've made a temporary repair, can you effect a more durable one? See over ➡