



Marine PLYWOOD

As a sailor of some 35yrs and having worked with, made and sold plywood for the past 30yrs I feel that it is time someone demystified the world of plywood and in particular marine plywood regrettably the public and the boating public in particular have no real idea or concept of what marine plywood should except that " It's damn expensive!".

The two basic glues used for exterior plywood are Type I melamine and phenolic, the Type I generally is considered inferior ,as the longevity of the bond and the ability to stand extreme variances of temperature do not generally make the bond as good as Phenolic, having said that much of the modern day fortified Type 1 glues do pass the test criteria and providing it meets the demands of the new standard it is perfectly acceptable for exterior applications.

Plywood grading is based on a set standard relating to appearance and construction with B/BB (now little used) the "Rolls Royce" of plywood and BB/CC which is basically the standard 1st grade of any plywood factory ;Grades such as C/CC etc are used principally for the coniferous or pine plywoods ,marine plywood is and should be to B/BB standard in terms of quality grading.

For the majority of marine applications a good BB/CC WBP Phenolic plywood will easily do the job if it is to be bonded or laminated with GRP or Epoxy, the new standard for Exterior WBP is EN636-3-EXT this should be marked on the plywood.

Let me state very simply what marine plywood actually should be in terms of construction,BS1088 was the old British Standard and this has never really been replaced, the Timber Trade Federation of the UK has issued guidelines for marine plywood and this comes under the BS1088-2003 terminology.

Marine plywood uses the same Phenolic glue as WBP BB/CC Exterior plywood the difference being that marine plywood is produce with a durable species of wood and must have a face and back outer veneer of 1.2-1.3mm before sanding so that the finished face veneer thickness is about 1mm,the core construction must have no gaps and there can be no filler repair on the faces or edges and generally it is a multiply construction so for example 18mm will be 11ply or 13ply,all the sheets and crates MUST be stamped and marked as BS1088-2003 and show the manufacturers name and country of origin. A good producer through his representative office or agent will offer

guidance upon request by way of a fact sheet on use of plywood and the verification of the source raw material, in the form usually of a certificate,

The term "legal" timber is often used, broadly speaking timber products marked FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) can be considered legal however there are a myriad of other well accepted verification systems in place, essentially what we want to confirm is that the raw material comes from trees that have been harvested under ITTO globally recognised sustainable practices and are from well managed forests, always these trees are marked or tagged and will carry some sort of certificate of legality which can be applied and attributed to the product being produced.

Regrettably there is much plywood that is allegedly normal BB/CC Exterior coming into the market from China who through aggressive pricing has captured nearly 50pct of the UK plywood market, whilst nurturing the illegal timber industry worldwide with China's voracious appetite holding no respect for indigenous peoples or preservation and continuance of global forest reserves.

Much of the plywood made in China is simply marked "Far Eastern Plywood" a nomenclature set to confuse the layman and circumvent trading standards;

The China plywood is generally made from "bits and pieces" much from illegal logs and does not have any provenance, generally any certificates of provenance are suspect (including the CE standard), the glue is very often only good for internal use only, however like a "woman of the night" first impressions are of a pleasing attractive piece of plywood but when the makeup comes off and you "put the light on" starting to use it then the true picture is revealed it is cheap BUT "Caveat Emptor"! remember there is always a reason something is cheap and usually quality and integrity are being sacrificed somewhere.

From Indonesia, India, Brazil and Malaysia there is still some good factories producing quality marine plywood but regrettably the UK timber trade is beset by a general apathy and ignorance on the part of the customer and a lack of information and by some suppliers, don't forget some large building supplies groups are so big they often do not have the ability to "self police" on items such as this.

For example in the past some marine plywood from the traditional supplying countries being sold into the UK market is nothing more than "Tarted" up and remarked BB/CC Exterior sold as marine plywood for the higher price it is only the public that can effectively monitor this through product awareness.

So ask questions and demand answers, question the source of the raw material used, look at the plywood in your builders merchants or timber yard and if the plywood you are being shown as marine has core gaps on the ends or sides or repairs and filler on the faces or face veneers of less than 1mm thick, reject it or better still call in your trading standards officer and complain, for too long us Yachties have had to put up with indifferent quality so armed with some knowledge at least we can fight for quality and value for money and ensure there are some trees left for our children's children.

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