

FixnZip: a repair for broken zips

Drew Maglio finds an innovative solution for corroded, seized zips

Over the course of boat ownership, I've found few mechanisms that cause such aggravation as the zipper. Used to fasten canvas, isinglass windows, headliners and other boat appendages, the zipper is not well-suited to the marine environment. On older boats, most zippers are comprised of an aluminium alloy which readily corrodes in the salty marine environment. When an aluminium zipper oxidises, the powdery corrosion welds the zipping mechanism to the track, which prevents operation.

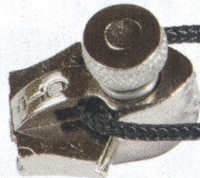
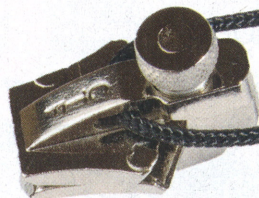
If caught soon enough, the stuck zipper may be freed with acids that dissolve corrosion, such as alcohol, acetone, vinegar, lemon juice or soda. However, if left to their own devices, the zipper and track become one and little can be done except to take the article in question to a canvas shop to remove the ruined zipper track and sew a new one on. On previous boats, I've had to do this for canvas dodgers, at a cost of about \$100 per zipper track.

New zippers are usually coated with plastic and therefore work much more smoothly and last much longer in the corrosive marine environment.

For our current boat, a 1987 Ericson 38-200 sailboat, replacement is impossible because the zippers I had to free are for the vinyl headliner, which is zippered to allow access to wiring and hardware fastened to the cabin top. While the initial design may have been clever, after 32 years many of the zippers were welded via aluminum oxide corrosion to their track. Thus to access wiring and hardware, my only option seemed to be to cut the headliner and then cover the wound by sewing it back together clumsily by hand with an awl, or to cover it



Corroded interior zip on headlining



The three sizes of FixnZip

with some sort of trim. So I started digging and the solution I found is worth sharing as this is a common problem on boats.

After many Google searches and countless hours spent perusing various online boating forums, I stumbled across a post by a fellow who claimed his family had invented and patented the 'ubiquitous zipper'. Whether true or false, he nonetheless demonstrated his expertise by recommending an obscure product dubbed 'FixnZip' to ameliorate fouled zippers. Although skeptical at first, I ordered the product which came in a bundle of three different sizes: small,

upwards direction. The slider will, in many cases, simply break in half and then the track may be opened and whatever hardware or wiring underneath that prompted this whole ordeal, can be accessed and dealt with.

While FixnZip comes in three slider sizes, I found that despite the track in question being what I would consider 'small', the medium sized mechanism was easier to work with. FixnZip is in essence a two-piece zip slider held together by a spring-loaded locking screw. As such, it can be placed anywhere on an existing zipper track by pulling the track together

'FixnZip is a two-piece zip slider held together by a spring-loaded locking screw'

medium, and large. Advertised as reusable and a fix-all for most zipper products, I was highly dubious of the product's hype. That was, until the product arrived and I put it to the test!

Upon arrival, I first had to remove the seized zipper slider. This had to be done carefully in order to not further damage the track. FixnZip replaces the original slider, but if the track is missing teeth there's not much this product can do. After unsuccessfully trying to free the slider by saturating it with PB Blaster penetrating oil while wiggling it back and forth, I decided to break it from the track. For this task, a small flat-head screwdriver and needle-nose pliers are in order: simply hold the slider or track still and pry underneath the corroded slider in an

and tightening the screw.

I however, used it as a replacement slider for the original and utilised the original track beginning and termination points.

My method was as follows: unscrew the FixnZip, place it on the beginning of the track, pull the track together ensuring that the teeth are both in line and under slight tension, and then tighten the screw on the FixnZip slider and zip it up. If tension on the track is maintained and proper alignment is ensured, the replacement slider should zip effortlessly.

Once zipped, the mechanism can be unscrewed and gently pulled off ready for use on other pesky zipper tracks. In this case the track termination may either be left as-is or sewn to prevent it from re-opening.