

MARINE FABRICS – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHAT IS THE BEST FABRIC?

This is probably the question we hear most and there is actually no definitive answer; it depends on the intended use of the cover, its location/environment and, to an extent, personal preference.

Ideally the fabric protecting your boat should be breathable to keep down condensation and preventing trapped moisture building up beneath the cover which leads in-turn to mildew and mould growth, but there are many other considerations to take into account which will influence the final decision.

To make the best choice, it's important to weigh the facts about different types of fabrics and think of what would work best for your lifestyle, your boat and where you sail/cruise. We're going to give you an overview of a few of the features we believe are important to consider when choosing fabric for your next cover or canopy.

The first question to address is **breathable or non-breathable?**
or, to put it another way, **water resistant or waterproof?**

The terms **“waterproof”** and **“water resistant”** may seem to be interchangeable but they are not. Waterproof fabrics will always repel water, even if the fabric is old. Fabrics described as waterproof are usually vinyl, vinyl-coated or laminated. Water resistant fabrics do not inherently repel water but, rather, are treated to not let water soak through. In these fabrics, the coating will deteriorate over time and let water leak through. Water resistant fabrics can also leak when water is allowed to pool on their surface.

So, on the face of it one would assume that 100% waterproof is the way to go. Well, it isn't quite as simple as that because not only will a waterproof fabric keep water out, it will also keep in moisture which can present serious problems in the UK climate. Then there is also the issue that waterproof fabrics are generally much heavier due to the PVC coatings.

Here's the low-down on each of the fabrics we currently offer:

WATERPROOF/NON-BREATHABLE

PVC-coated Polyester

This is a fairly heavy fabric which tends to become stiff with age. It is generally coated with a PVC layer which has a grained texture on the top side and a smooth surface on the underside which is often silver/grey in colour. Some PVC's have a canvas backing;

these aren't really suitable for boat covers although I have seen a fair few.

Pros

100% Waterproof

Low maintenance: (they can easily be cleaned using soapy water, a hosepipe or even a power-wash. They don't require any special treatment and will never need re-waterproofing.)

Cons

100% Waterproof (Not breathable hence more condensation)

Colour fades with time

Fabric is heavy and more difficult to manage

Stiffens over time

Life expectancy - 8 - 10 years

WATER RESISTANT/BREATHABLE

ACRYLIC CANVAS

This is a lighter-weight fabric made from woven solution-dyed acrylic yarn and looks much like a traditional canvas material. It will retain its colour for many years and remain flexible throughout its lifetime but does require more care and routine maintenance including cleaning and re-proofing. It is available in a plain uncoated or PU coated versions. The uncoated is more breathable but less water resistant. It is typically used for making sprayhoods, sail covers and equipment bags/covers.

Pros

Breathable

Water resistant to 70cm (PU coated) or 35cm (Uncoated) (Figures may vary between different brands)

UV Resistant guaranteed 5 years

Life expectancy 10 - 15 years (Depending on maintenance)

Cons

Not as hard wearing as most other fabrics

Prone to Green on damp shaded areas

Prone to Mould & Mildew in warm moist environment.

Will need regular cleaning and occasional re-proofing to keep in top condition

POLYESTER-UNCOATED (Weathermax80, Top Notch 9 etc)

This is the lightest of all the fabrics and is specifically designed for large marine covers such as all-over boat covers but it is equally suitable for sprayhoods, canopies and enclosures of all types. It is an uncoated woven polyester fabric which performs amazingly well in a variety of marine environments.

Pros

Highly Breathable

Water resistant to 52 cm

UV resistant guaranteed 5 years (except Red Shades)

2 x the Tensile Strength of Acrylic canvas

6 x the Abrasion Resistance of Acrylic canvas

Dimensionally Stable - (Has negligible shrinkage or stretch)

Life expectancy 10 - 12 years

Cons

More expensive than other fabrics.

Being an uncoated fabric it can tend to let water pass when in contact with other surfaces e.g. over frames. This is generally outweighed by the fabric's breathability which allows moisture out of the cockpit area very swiftly.

Prone to Green on damp shaded areas

Prone to Mould & Mildew in warm moist environment.

Will benefit from regular cleaning and occasional re-proofing to keep in top condition.