So here we were with the headlining hanging round our ears on my Westerly Pageant.

This is normal on a boat I'm told especially a fifty year old Westerly that has never been refurbished.

Headlining in the front cabin had already been removed and revealed the ceiling to be a dirty brown mess of old glue and the lumps and bumps of the fibreglass woven inner skin and various bolts holding on chain plates and the like.

Knowing what was coming when the saloon cabin lining was removed and not wanting to spend hours scraping and sanding old glue (unless the boat could be turned upside down so I worked on what would effectively be the floor) the thinking cap went on.

After removal of the old lining which shed amazing amounts of black powdery ex-foam that had lost adhesion to the vinyl lining (causing the ceiling covering to give way) the shape of the cabin roof was not too complicated. True there are two areas where compound curves make life difficult but over all I could see that with a suitably bendy wood, the interior could be transformed into a cosy space which could include downlighters and space for hidden wiring.

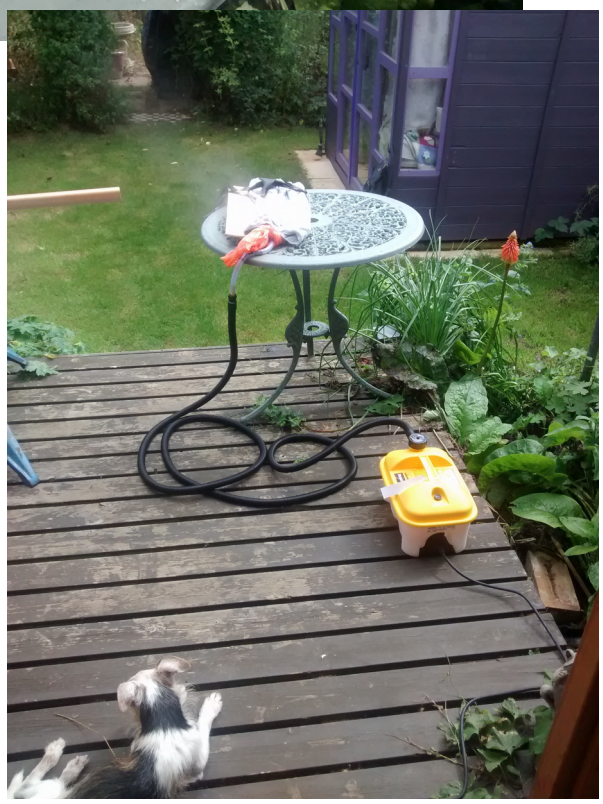
I've used bendy ply before but never to the extent of making it go round almost ninety degree curves as I wanted to do the cabin sides in one piece like the original.

I've steamed a lot of Oak and Ash in another life making furniture but that was always long but small section timber like 45mm x 120mm, quite small enough to go in a steam box. An eight by four sheet of ply would be a different scale altogether.

So I set about trialling localised steam application using a wallpaper steamer. They produce copious amounts of steam but are a bit too localised. Not only would one have to walk up and down the ply but the pad would heat too big an area. What was need was something that would steam the whole length of ply but only in the place needing bending.

So plastic pipe with holes all along seemed the solution and was trialled on a small rectangle of the 5mm bendy ply.

Three short pieces of pipe joined with a Y piece to the steamer outlet pipe. The longer two pipes having holes one inch apart all the way along and a bung in the end to force the steam out of the holes.



The two pipes I placed either side of the ply, covered it all in the best quality T towels and steamed for ten minutes.

When ready place in the trusty workmate and try bending!

The piece pushed over easily and was clamped down round and old piece of kitchen worktop nosing.

When dry the ply set in it’s new shape with easily enough bend to go round the bottom of the cabin sides.

So how to measure?

The decision about how many pieces of ply to use was ultimately made by the dimensions of the cabin. Length was no problem but the sides from under the turn to the middle of the cabin roof was more than a sheet wide and fitting a huge bit of wobbly ply in only two bits didn't appeal anyway.

So each side was measured and the ply cut and marked where the bend would come when steamed up. The workmate had been OK on a small length but we needed nearly eight feet of bending so set about fashioning two 4x3's, one for each side of the ply. The bend line level with the top.

Two long pipes replaced the test ones and looked too long for one steamer so a borrowed one connected to the other end of the pipes so steam could blow down from both ends.

The holes in the pipes pointed toward the ply from both sides and were held in place by lightly held ‘G’ cramps and the whole lot covered in towels to contain heat of the steam and try to prevent water staining from steam running down the ply.

Twenty minutes steaming and the ply felt ready to bend using an old bit of skirting the right length to put even pressure on the bend line.

Once both side were bent they were taken to the boat to fit.

Lots of planing later and having to increase the gap between the cupboard tops and the hull the first side went in.

Followed by the second.

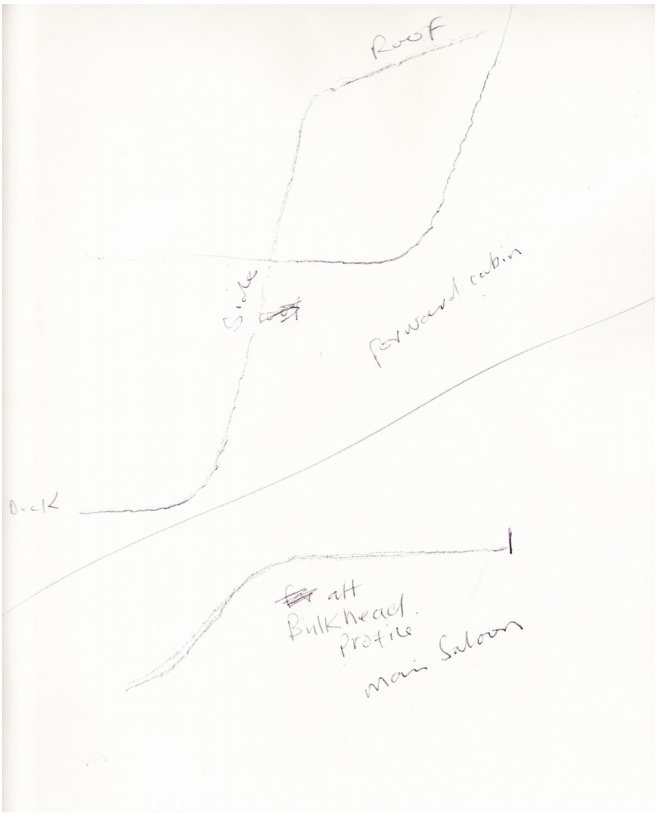
The next stage: Where do the window holes go?

Made a paper template same size and shape as the bent ply, taped them up against the windows and pressure marked the window positions basically where the glass is as decided to make window frames to cover the aluminium windows and seal the ply agains the frames using rubber self adhesive foam strip and screws into the inner frame of each window; holding on the side panel and frames

All the ply was insulated with anti damp, graphite backed foam.

And the windows cut out.

Once the side were up, the cabin roof was sketched out, measured and cut to size.
Then more bending trimming and fitting.



I opted for invisible fixings called “Big Hat Poppets” These are a two part push fit, one glued to the substrate to be held up the other to the ceiling so they are all glued in place after only needing to scrape a small area for the epoxy to bond. They are then clipped together and the covered in epoxy and the substrate pushed up against the plastic part of the poppet.

The outer edge of the ply is dropped into a groove in the covering board which is carved from Utile. This holds the top edge of the side panel and the outer edge of the ceiling panel.

In hindsight I should have used more Poppets, but the gaps the Poppets create (5mm) allows for the insulation and a small air gap which keeps the cabin cool in hot and warm in cold weather.

The panels were wedge up using pine poles.

Covering strips added and a hand carved piece where the compound curve made life interesting.

All in all headroom is only reduced by around 12mm which is still standing headroom in my case (5’101/2) and it’s a job that unless the boat sinks (and then it doesn’t matter) will never need doing again. If required it could be changed with a coat of paint.