

● Crank the Laundry

Doing the laundry on a boat during a cruise or passage presents a bit of a challenge. Alongshore you can usually find a laundromat within a short hike from the boat. Big marinas and small towns almost always have them. But if you're not within easy striking distance of a laundry, or you just don't relish spending a vacation morning herding a bag of underwear around, there are other, onboard means. Over the years we've seen a variety of them, including more than one family who shut their cockpit scuppers, half-filled their cockpit wells with warm, soapy water, and agitated the laundry with their feet while quaffing beer in the noonday sun.

More commonly, people keep a simple laundry tub aboard and hand-wash their stuff.

Is there a middle-ground—something purpose-built, not too big, not too expensive, not demanding of electricity? Apparently so. The purveyors of the Wonder Wash sent us one of their products to try. This we have done, and we're impressed.

The principle of the Wonder Wash method is simple: It's a pressure vessel. You put in your laundry, soap, and water. The warmer the water, the more pressure is developed inside the vessel when you agitate it. The idea is that the increased pressure helps force the dirt out of the clothing, so that you can achieve a clean wash in a small amount of cranking time.

The idea makes some sense, and we did find that our laundry got clean in two minutes or so of agitation. Whether it would have done so without the increased pressure inside, we don't know.

Test One

Washed approx. 4.5 lbs. of clothes: 4 adult T-shirts, 4 men's underwear, 2 child's underwear, 1 bath towel. Used 2 tablespoons of Arm & Hammer powdered laundry soap and 6 liters hot water (the maximum recommended in the directions). Rotated drum for 2:20, reversing direction several times. Drained and rinsed

twice using 8 liters cold water each time. Agitated 2 minutes each rinse. Wash was good and clean. Six liters of water in the wash cycle didn't seem like enough.

Test Two

Washed approx 3.5 lbs. of clothes: 6 adult T-shirts, 4 men's underwear, 1 pair socks. Used 2 tablespoons of Arm & Hammer powdered laundry soap and 8 liters hot water (exceeded recommendations). Rotated drum for 2:00, reversing direction several times. Drained and rinsed once using 8 liters cold water. Agitated 2 minutes. Again, wash was clean, and seemed better rinsed this time.

It appears to us that there are several advantages to the Wonder Wash machine: It does small loads of laundry well, and in little time. It contains the laundry load in a small space, with no sloshing and splashing. It uses no power. It weighs 5.6 lbs. and costs \$42.95.

It has one major disadvantage: on a small boat it will be a space hog. A big bucket takes up space, too, but it can serve a lot of purposes—bailing, deck-sluicing, storage for wet gear—and laundry washing. A piece of gear as big as the Wonder Wash needs to serve more than one purpose, and the obvious one is as a laundry hamper.

Construction is generally very good. The pressure cylinder is tough plastic, and is well-fitted with a large gasketed lid that is pulled tight against the neck of the vessel with a screw-down knob. The cylinder rotates inside two triangular brackets with snap-in cross-braces and suction feet. The snap-in braces are quite secure, and

Cranking isn't difficult, but you do need to apply a steady hand to the base. We reversed direction several times to give muscles a change of pace. If you set things up like this, you can drain right into the cockpit scuppers. (Use bio-degradable soap.) The push-valve drain tube works very well.



Wonder Wash pressure vessel with drain tube attached.

should stand up well under moderate use. If any of the tabs break, however, a new bracket will be needed. The snap-in tabs are meant to be covered with ill-fitting and unnecessary plastic bungs. Not a worry—just toss them out. The crank handle is comfortable to use, but slides a bit too easily on and off the square cranking axle.

The only other part is the removable drain spout, which is cleverly designed to activate a valve when pushed onto the spigot on the bottom of the tank and twisted into place.

We think realistic (generous) water use for one wash and one rinse would be about 16 liters, or about 4.2 gallons. It's a significant amount of water, but no more than what you would use in a tub. So... water use is a wash. ■

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