TRIED&TESTED

We put the latest kit through its paces

Smart new Parmafendering means Hugo can now come alongside in his precious vinyl-wrapped Karnic (not just this grotty old dinghy!)

ParmaFender system

From €31.80 per metre

Ever since I had my Karnic vinyl-wrapped with a metallic silver finish, I have become even more precious about protecting it from knocks and scrapes. Unfortunately, asking my boat-sharing brothers to use a fender whenever they come alongside our rickety old pier is like asking a caveman to eat with chopsticks – it ain't gonna happen. Using the principal that if Mohammed won't go to the mountain, the mountain must come to Mohammed, I decided to cover the entire pier in fenders instead.

My research led me to a Norwegian company that had recently launched a brand new fendering system. The ParmaFender is a continuous chain of air-filled fender pockets which can be cut to any length and even bent round corners, giving you a custom-made solution at a DIY price. Solid sections between each pocket allow it to be mounted to wood, metal or concrete using a combination of screws, bolts or metal bands. It's made of super tough thermoplastic polyurethane that can survive anything from -50°C to being driven over by a lorry, so it might even be strong enough to withstand my brothers' berthing attempts.

Once I'd measured up our boatyard's pier and discussed the best fitting methods, I put in an order for a 10m and 6m kit of 90mm-width black ParmaFender (grey is the other option), which after currency conversion came to £464 in total. Within a week the package had arrived at our office but what I hadn't quite anticipated was just how big and heavy 16 metres of ParmaFender would be; it took two strong people just to lift the 57kg load into a car.

Having got it down to the boatyard I then had to wait for another willing helper to manoeuvre it along the pier and start the fitting process. Thankfully both the instructions and the fittings provided were simple but comprehensive. In essence all you have to do is drill a pair of holes in the solid plastic section between each fender cushion and either screw, bolt or strap it to whatever surface you're attaching it to. In the case of our pier that's a combination of flaky old railway tracks and rotting softwood held together by rusty bolts and garden twine!

Undeterred, we set to with cordless drills and self-tapping screws for the main horizontal runs. The rusting steel uprights proved rather trickier, being shorter and narrower than the fenders as well as riddled with rust. Drilling them was a non-starter and we struggled to get enough purchase on the steel straps so we settled for extra tough cable ties. The only other tricky bit was ensuring that the fendered sections aligned with the corners of the pier and leaving a two inch gap behind them so that they still had room to inflate around the corners.

It took two of us the best part of a day to install but seeing all the fender pockets inflate along the full length as we pumped away using a standard bicycle pump was strangely satisfying. The end result is neat, discreet and seemingly indestructible. It's probably now the strongest part of the whole pier and seems to have withstood the battering of everything from storm Desmond to brothers Andreae. Long may it stay that way. **Hugo**

Contact www.parmafender.com

VALUE RATING ★★★☆☆

Fenders can be attached with screws, bolts or metal bands

The continuous chain of inflatable fenders can even be fitted round corners

Once fixed in place, the fenders are easily inflated with a bicycle pump