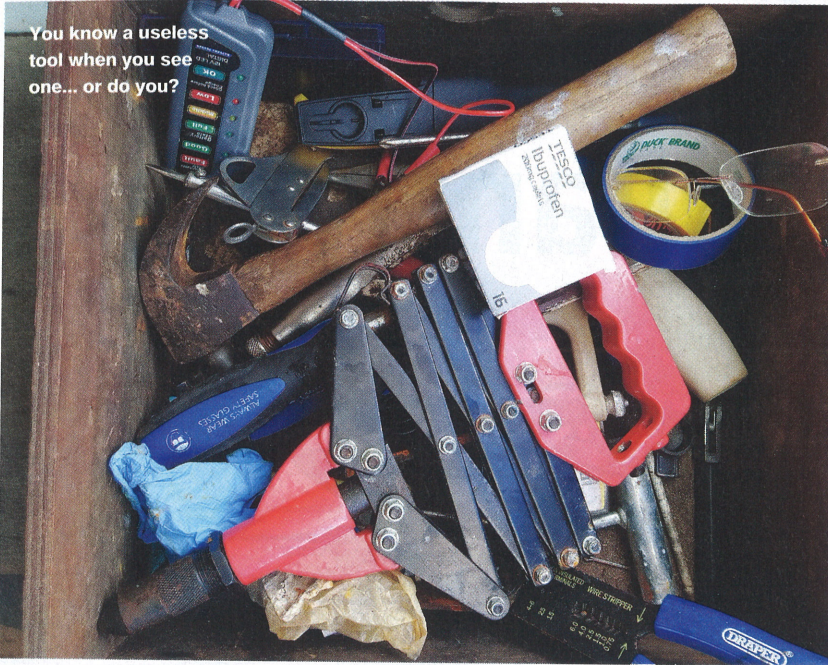




Sam Llewellyn

Flotsam and jetsam

Sam Llewellyn writes nautical thrillers and edits *The Marine Quarterly*. He is currently patching up a 30ft ketch



You know a useless tool when you see one... or do you?

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Toolbox review

You know a useless tool when you see one

In the bleak midwinter the boat is far to the north of here, dripping icicles. The toolbox, a crafty arrangement that fits into a drawer under the bottom step of the companionway, is in the shed and under review.

According to the Centre Nautique des Glénans it is folly to take stuff off the boat in the winter, as you will infallibly forget to put it back on again in the spring. This year, however, we have decided to make an exception. The tools have been with us these 30 years or so, and it seemed like a good idea to give them a once-over, and decide which ones can after all this time be dispensed with.

There is a socket set, naturally. Two socket sets, actually – one imperial, as the boat was originally built using feet and inches; and another metric, as subsequent modifications have been done according to that beastly foreign system. The socket sets are okay.

There is less certainty about the ring spanners, which are so battered that fitting them to a nut is a matter of trial and error, except for the half-inch, which is

identifiable by what looks like a set of toothmarks halfway down its shaft, the biter's identity lost in the mists of time. Still, ring spanners are handy. Squirt with WD40 and retain.

There are many, many screwdrivers. There are some for old-school slotted screws, including a huge thing useless for anything except levering oysters open and therefore essential. There are plenty of Phillips screwdrivers, bought when Phillips was the last word in sophistication. Since fashion in screwdrivers lasts about as long as this year's catwalk gear there are also plenty of Allen keys and a wide selection of those star things as used by our Continental exes. There are screws of all designs all over the boat, some tiny, hence the jewellers' screwdrivers in sizes microscopic, infinitesimal, very small and small, for mending gizmos with screens without which we are lost. Literally. Hang on to the screwdrivers, then.

The riveters, though. There is one riveter you squeeze. Problem is, all rivets on board are monel, and rather tough, so the riveter is fine if you have hands like a cage

fighter, but not much cop if you are an ordinary citizen of riper years. It is therefore vital to have one of those criss-cross things known as a lazy tongs riveter. Vital, that is, until you find yourself at the top of the mast in a bosun's chair trying to put a monel pop rivet in the hole provided. You give the lazy tongs riveter the requisite shove. Action and reaction being equal and opposite, you find yourself swinging far from the mast. Down on the deck, small as a willow leaf 40ft below, your oppo is clinging to the safety line like grim death and screaming fire, police, ambulance. Up the mast, then, it is the squeeze riveter or nothing. So both riveters stay.

Then there is the thing for crimping electric connections and a few chisels for artistic woodworking and leverage and obviously a hammer and certainly some copper nails. And of course the, well, what actually is it? It is a sort of folding knife. On one side is a blade, appallingly sharp. On the other is a spike of square section, either for use with marline or for taking the

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stones out of horses' hooves; and a sort of blade with a teardrop-shaped hole in it which is presumably designed for the undoing of shackles, though it does not seem to fit any shackle on the boat, and a Leatherman does the job fine anyway. People who see it for the first time wag their heads and say they don't make them like that any more, and it isn't difficult to work out why. But it conveys to the toolbox an atmosphere of old-world charm and heavy timber bowsprits. Man does not live by bread alone. The sort of folding knife thing stays.

Then there are the pliers and the mole grips and the rest of it, without which the nautical household is completely stuffed. These very useful tools are often in short supply, as being the most used they are the most likely to be dropped overboard. So it is ho for the internet and purchase a few more. And to come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as useless tools, except for those people who own giant concrete marinas and keep putting their prices up.

