

A Living Thing

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If God meant us to have fibreglass boats, he would have made fibreglass trees. That statement will remain eligible for Bartlett's Familiar Quotations for as long as wooden sailboats survive.

And they will survive, despite the fact crockery boats fare better in almost every way.

Fibreglass is stronger. It can't leak, needs almost no maintenance, is simply repaired. Hulls are precision moulded.

Wooden boats built from the same jig are all different. They are furniture which sinks when put in the water. They need constant attention, are easily damaged, difficult to fix.

We bought a used Beetle Cat last week and paid for it by selling two fibreglass boats. The boats we sold will be around forever, cared for or not. The Beetle Cat will age, we trust gracefully and lovingly, and ultimately pass on. Which really says

it all. A wooden boat is a living thing. The other is apparatus.

The sounds of life are wood against wood, the jaws of the throat grabbing the mast, the mast straining against the deck, the centerboard trembling in the hull. The boat is reporting on the weather and commenting on her handler. The language is halyards slapping, sails shaking, the indescribable melody played beneath the hull and heard best when you stick your head under the foredeck.

Then there are the smells, varnish, canvas, rope. And the feel ...

The people who bought our fibreglass boats asked how old they were. We told them, but it didn't matter. Our Beetle Cat is four years old, just coming into her prime. That is an important fact. It is a stage in her life. She is frisky, quite strong, but not quite perfect in some respects. She will change and a lot of how she changes will depend on us. It's a responsibility, owning a loving thing.