

Installing Jib Sheet Block Tracks on the Seats Without an Access Hole

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Here are some possible ways to install tracks on the seats without cutting holes in the seats for access to the bottom of the seat. Not all of these options will work for every boat. I have done Options 1 and 2 and both worked fairly well. Note, you may be tempted to use self-tapping screws instead of nuts and bolts (machine screws). That's fine if you never intend in sailing in winds above 12 knots. In heavier wind the self-tapping screws will simply pull out.

Most Mutts have flotation foam located under the seats, but there is typically a 1-4 inch gap between the top of the flotation foam and the bottom of the seat. In all cases use #10 SS panhead screws with SS flat washers and Nylok nuts. You can buy #10 fender washers from Jamestown Distributors and these would be best to use for Option 1. For Option 2 use regular #10 washers. Drill holes in the fiberglass for the screws using the track as a template. Note, most Mutts have plywood underneath the seat, so you will be drilling through fiberglass and plywood.

Option 1. Gap is greater than 1.5". Remove inspection port at the chain plate. If this is a screw-out port, also remove the female part of the port which is typically held in place with self-tapping screws. This will provide a larger opening to work through. If you have big fat arms, then find someone with relatively thin arms who is a minimum of 5'-7" tall. Put on a long sleeve shirt to protect your arm from the rough fiberglass of the inspection port. Put your arm through the inspection port and wiggle your hand and forearm into the gap to orient yourself. Feel for the holes you drilled in the seat top. Remove your arm. Cover the bottom of the track with caulk. Since this caulk will be out of the sun, silicon caulk should be adequate. I have used GE silicon II with good results and you can get this just about anywhere. Place the track in the final position. Put a dab of caulk on the end of a machine screw then push it through the hole in the track and in the seat top. Do the same for the remainder of the screws.

Next, coat 1 side of a washer with silicon caulk. Then put a dab of caulk on the tip of your trigger finger. Stick the washer onto this dab with the coated side of the washer facing away from your finger. Reach into the inspection port and feel for a screw with your middle finger. Once you have located the screw gently push the washer over it and then press the washer up against the plywood. The caulk will act as a glue and hold the washer in place. Withdraw your arm and apply another dab of caulk to your fingertip. Stick a nut to your finger and place the nut over the screw. When it's in place have a helper turn the screw to get it started. Do the same with the other screws. The aft-most screw is a bit of a challenge, but it's really not too bad.

Next, get a combo open end/closed end wrench to fit the #10 nut (I think it's a 3/8" wrench) and attach a string to the box end to help recover the wrench if you drop it. Hold the wrench over each nut as your helper tightens the screw.

If the gap is large enough and you can get someone with long enough arms, this same exercise can be done on pre-1979 boats with the long-armed person lying inside the cuddy doing all this work from inside the cuddy instead of through the inspection port.

Option 2. Gap is 0.5 - 1.5 inches and pre-1979 boat with access to the under-seat area via the cuddy. Make a backing board out of 1/4 or 3/8" thick plywood. Use regular #10 washers for this option, not fender washers. Cut backing board 2" wide and two inches longer than the track. Drill holes in the backing board using the track as a template. Also drill holes in the seat top using the track as a template. Attach the track to the backing board with the machine screws, washers and nuts. Mix up a batch of epoxy and add colloidal silica until it is stiff as toothpaste. Carefully brush the exposed threads of the screws with lubricating oil. Do not get oil on the nuts or plywood. Cover each nut with epoxy, but leave the exposed screw threads uncovered. The epoxy should extend out from the outside of each nut by 3/8-1/2" all around. After the epoxy cures "uncrack" each screw and remove.

Use thin, stiff metal wire as fish wire. Bend the end of a piece of wire in a curve of 1-2" radius and insert it into the rear-most track hole in the deck. Thread it forward along the top of the foam until it can be reached from inside the cuddy. Thread this wire into the end hole of the backer board with the wire exiting through the nut. Pull about 5' of wire through the backing board. Make a loop with a washer attached to the loop. Do the same with another wire to the nut at the other end of the backing board. Stick the two wires sticking out of the holes on the seat top through the appropriate holes in the track. Apply caulk to the bottom of the track and place it into position on the top of the seat. Push the backing board into the gap from the cuddy. Slowly pull on the fish wires until they are held tightly against the seat bottom and the holes are lined up. Install machine screws in the inner track holes. Leave them slightly loose. Pull the first wire out from within the cuddy and install a screw into the hole vacated on the track. Then do the same to the other wire. Tighten up all screws and you're done.

Option 3. Gap is less than 0.5" on pre-1979 boat. Crawl inside the cuddy with a broom handle with a cutting edge wired onto the end. Chop away at the top of the foam to make a channel to allow you to do Option 2.

Option 4. Gap is less than 1.5" on a 1979 or later boat. This is the toughest situation. You can try to chop out foam from the top of the foam block with a knife or chisel to make a gap of 1.5" while working through the inspection hole. This will be hard work since it's difficult to do this type of work through the inspection hole. If you can manage to do so, then use Option 1. If not, I suggest you buy two 4" inspection ports and make holes in the lower sides of the seats. Then cut out the foam from these inspection ports to make room for you to do Option 1 via these new ports.