From the Quarterdeck

by John Ruiz,
Vice Commodore

Duct Tape & Cotton Balls

If you have spent a lot of time on the water cruising or sailboat racing, you probably have had to make emergency repairs on the spot - either to get your boat back to port or to keep your boat in the race. You find ways to repair broken equipment with whatever you have on board. That is why I never leave the dock without a roll of duct tape. I've had to make emergency repairs on a broken water hose in the middle of the gulf using duct tape and a few electrical tie wraps. Duct tape and a couple of welding rods have spliced back together a broken stanchion. I've even used it for sail repair when nothing else was available. Fellow crew mates have used duct tape to fasten on their seasickness patch-- keeping it in place on hot sweaty days. You can even use it to seal up leaky air conditioner ducts (what it was originally designed to do.)

A few years back, a friend came to me with a problem: he had some welding repairs done on the bow pulpit of his boat, but the welding had melted the electrical wires that ran inside the stainless steel tubing to the bow running lights. My job was to figure out how to re-run the wires in the stainless tubing of the bow pulpit assembly that had four 90- degree bends and an entrance and exit hole that were each ½" in diameter. The old wires had been pulled out already, so I could not use them to pull in the new wires. I had tried an electrical fish tape and it didn't work. I tried baling wire, aluminum wire and piano wire to fish through the bends of the tubing but nothing worked. I could not find anything to use to help me fish the new wires through the repaired bow pulpit. I resorted to hanging the bow pulpit assembly in the air, dangling a string inside the tubing and flipping the assembly when the string came to a bend. That didn't work either. Then I tried pushing the string through the tubing with compressed air which worked…until the string bunched up in the tubing. Then it hit me: I needed something in front of the string to keep it moving. I got a cotton ball from the first aid kit and tied a length of thread to it. I then duck-taped up all of the other openings except for the entrance and exit holes. I stuffed the cotton ball into the entrance hole, hit it with a little compressed air and out popped the cotton ball from the exit hole with the thread attached. The rest was easy - the thread was then tied to a length of cord and the cord was secured to the new wires which I carefully pulled into place.

Think you have read this story before? Maybe you have. My cotton ball story was published in the "Things That Work" column of *Sail Magazine*, October 2003 edition.

See you at the lake …. and don't forget the duct tape!
John Ruiz