

CASE STUDY

From Dream to Reality – The Evolution of SewLong Custom Covers

About 20 years ago, Justin Jones of SewLong Custom Covers saw the new Gemini hinge and it sparked a great idea. From that idea came the first iteration of custom boat tops for which SewLong is known. SewLong recently launched the third version of its popular folding canopy top, winning the coveted Marine Fabricators Association 2019 Excellence Award for Tops. Those tops are manufactured exclusively using RECacril.

While Justin started SewLong in 1999, he grew up in the fabrication industry, watching his father, Jack, craft everything from boat covers to car seats. It was when Justin was attending an industry show that he saw a new hinge from Gemini, sparking a solution to a problem that had long vexed him. SewLong serves the tournament ski boat market and, at the time, a good sunshade solution did not exist for the increasingly popular towers that were being added to these crafts. The most common solution was to force a traditional bimini shade into the top of the tower to provide shade. While it was a serviceable solution, the look was not particularly elegant or sleek, and there was always the matter

of installation, removal and storage with which to contend. Justin couldn't help but think that there must be a better way to incorporate a shade into the tower structure. Seeing the new hinge was just the catalyst he needed to envision a cover that could quickly release, fold back and stow easily on the tower with minimal fuss.

Justin quickly went to work crafting his first tower and cover which he installed on his own wakeboard craft. This quick release cover and tower frame was the first iteration of the very popular Folding Canopy Top. Pleased with that first design, Justin loaded his boat onto a trailer and hauled it around



to the local boat dealers. While the dealers were suitably impressed and started to place orders for this new tower cover, it quickly became clear that installation wasn't the easiest, so Justin returned to the workshop to develop a solution.

FABRICATOR:



CLIENT:

SewLong Custom Covers

APPLICATION:

Marine

PRODUCT:

Folding Canopy Top

FABRIC:

RECacril

To accommodate the different widths of towers and allow for faster and easier installation for both dealers and consumers, Justin added a clamping system to his covers. These universal clamps allowed for installation on virtually any size tower in a matter of minutes, radically improving upon the previously required custom installation.

Today, SewLong has further improved the design by replacing the original plastic hinges with more durable metal ones designed to universally fit nearly any tower. Traditional solid struts have been replaced with a strut-in-tube design to allow for a more compact, neater and cleaner look when the top is stowed. Additionally, several different mounting bracket and strut assemblies were made available to accommodate the growing variety of towers on the market, all made with brand and/or design specific hardware. Surf pockets have been incorporated into the covers for convenient board storage and, of course, the quality fabric from Recasens.



Justin found the Recasens flagship product, RECacril, when he spoke to a fellow fabricator who was using it.

“He said to me ‘hold it up to the light, you can SEE the tighter weave,’ and he was right,” comments Justin. “We really like the heavier hand and how flat it lays when we go to plot and cut it. It doesn’t get caught up on our computerized cutters like other fabrics, and because the fabric’s body comes from the tight weave rather than added starches or resins, we’re finding that it holds its shape and integrity much longer than the competition.”

Justin credits his personal passion for wakeboarding and an unwavering persistence as the driving factors behind the success of his company. SewLong has continuously worked to improve upon existing designs as well as developing new ones to accommodate the latest tower designs as they emerge. All of these improvements, as well as the use of superior grade products like RECacril and RECwater during fabrication, led to the most recent version of the tower cover winning the coveted Marine Fabricators Association 2019 Excellence Award for Tops.

Justin foresees a bright future for the company.

“At least half of the tops we make now are custom designs while the others roll off a production line,” adds Justin. “We’re examining ways to increase the amount of production line products to get more quality covers into market faster and we certainly see outstanding suppliers like Recasens being essential to achieving that goal.”