

Tent camping

Soggy saga of ups and downs

By HELEN FURCEAN

What follows are the confessions of a noncamper. Oh, it isn't that I didn't give it my best shot, mind you. I really tried. Read on, I'm sure you'll agree.

It all began a few years ago when my now-teen children were a bit younger. I guess you could say I fell victim to all the propaganda about much fun tenting can be. Anyway, it was May and the breezes were balmy and I lost my head and bought a camper.

Naturally, I couldn't wait to try it out and so, after a few weeks of practicing camping in the backyard, my kids and I set out on our first two-day trip.

Since this was to be a trial run, we didn't want to get too far from civilization and decided to set up camp in a field behind my aunt's cottage in Canada.

It was a beautiful, warm day and the trip across the border was great except for the fact that I had never driven with a trailer before and I kept stopping every time we went over bump and made the kids get out and see if the thing was still attached.

Once over the bridge, I made a little error and turned the wrong way. Now, you have to admit that after driving in Detroit all my life, getting lost in downtown Windsor takes a little doing. But we were soon on our way and it only took us twice as long as it should have to get to the cottage.

We set up camp in record time. I started dinner and it started to sprinkle. Just a slight sprinkle, just enough to make cooking outside impossible and just enough to start the temperature dropping.

By nine o'clock we were freezing. Our Jiffy tent heater that had worked so well at home didn't work at all now, and to make matters worse, it really started raining. We cheated...grabbing a lantern, we ran for the cottage.

Sunday dawned clear and lovely. Great, because the tent had to be dry when we took it down, or we would have to put it up again when we got home so it wouldn't mildew.

We decided to leave at 3. At 2:45 p.m., it started to rain. We raced around like nuts throwing things into the storage compartment, taking down the poles, folding, lifting, tying down as fast as we could. Would you believe that a woman and three kids, 8, 9 and 6 years old, could take down an 18-foot tent in 10 minutes. Of course, as soon as we were finished, it stopped raining.

By that time I was too exhausted to straighten the things in the storage compartment, so we just got in the car and left.

Coming back across the bridge,

the customs man decided to stop and look in our lumpy trailer. I opened the first side of the compartments, he took one look at the horrible mess and passed up checking the second side.

Our next trip was two weeks later. Venturing a little farther this time, we went to one of our state parks. It was wonderful the first two days. On the second night (we were leaving in the morning), I was awakened by an uncomfortable feeling of dampness. You're right. It had started to rain. Did I say rain? It was more like the lake had moved to where we were. This feeling was intensified by the fact that I had chosen a low, bare spot to camp on and the floor of the tent was submerged.

We tried to wait it out, but by 4 p.m. in the afternoon, it was still coming down and if we didn't leave pretty soon, we wouldn't get home before dark. There was nothing else to do but get out in that rain and take down the tent.

Our greatest obstacle was the complete lack of boots and rain gear. It wasn't long before my son and I were soaked to the skin. With the rain dripping down our faces, we struggled with the sopping canvas.

After a great deal of heaving, grunting, and underbreath swearing, the canvas was finally secure. Now all that remained was to raise the legs on the camper and connect it to the car.

The first two legs came up fine, but the third had buried itself in the ground and I couldn't budge it. Not all the pulling, banging or slightly louder oaths would move the darn thing. By this time I was so wet and so mad that I threw my hammer on the ground and stalked off the car.

"That's it!" I yelled. "I've had it. I'm leaving the darned thing sit there and I'm going home. It can rot for I care."

Just then there was a tap at the window and my nine-year-old son opened the door and said, "I got it up, Ma."

It rained on and off for the next week. All the while, the tent was up in the yard waiting for the first dry day so we could put it down. The dry day came. The next day it rained again and the wind blew the tarp off and soaked the canvas again, so up it went again.

I spent the best part of that summer putting up and taking down that tent. We finally sold it -- I had to quit while I was ahead. Wouldn't you?

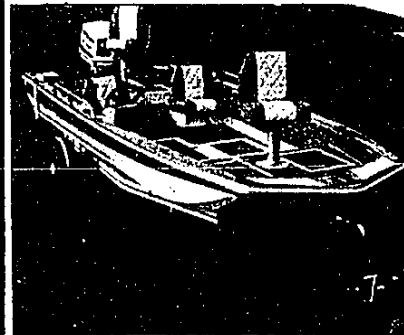
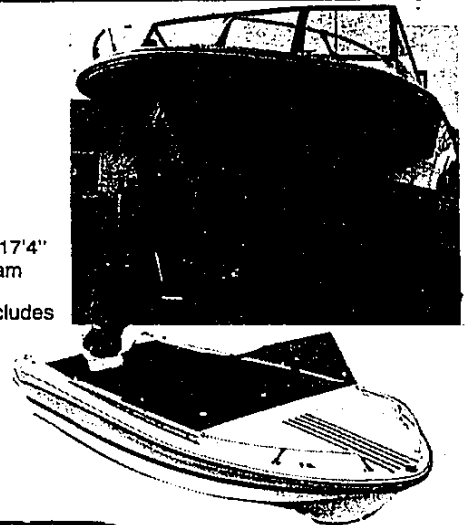
Helen Furcean is an Observer and Eccentric production department employee.

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MORSAL MARINE

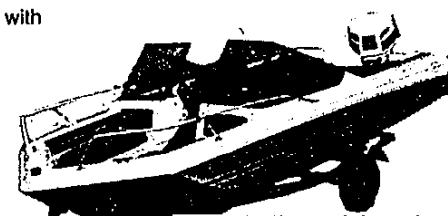
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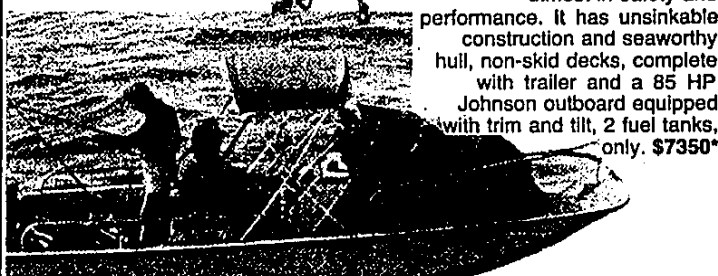


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