

Hinge and Hide It

Fit your rig in the garage with a swing-away tongue.

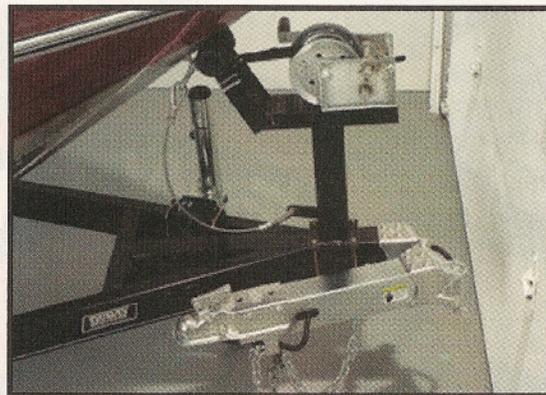
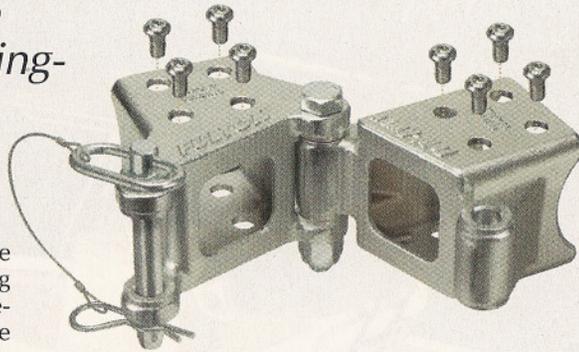
By ARIEL CABRERA

Not able to fit your boat in the garage? Or maybe feeling hesitant about getting a boat because it won't fit in there? You're not alone. Numerous boaters experience the same problem, and many resort to tedious and expensive custom work by professional trailer shops.

The good news is there are now complete kits available to get this task done, start to finish, on your own. Just a little elbow grease and a little help from a buddy will be needed so you can get that garage door to close behind your boat—DIY style! Cost is \$110 to \$155, depending on the model and where you buy.

Keeping your rig at home in the garage has multiple advantages. First, it is out of thieves' sights. Second, indoor protection against UV light, heat and outdoors elements keeps your boat new-looking. And lastly, your boat will always be prepared because you can leave tackle and electronics in place. Just press the garage door button and "Open Sesame."

Fulton Performance Products (www.fultonperformance.com or www.cequentgroup.com) offers complete kits with all the necessary hardware and assembly instructions. (Do the measurement math first before you invest in a kit—some rigs won't fit, period.) They install easily on 3-inch by 3-inch or 3-inch by 4-inch trailer tongues (be sure to measure yours before you order) with 3,500 pounds or 5,000 pounds gross weight capacities, reducing 21 to 34 inches of total length. Basic tools such as a Sawzall power metal saw, drill, grinder or sander, wrenches, and measuring tape are required to get the job done. The following steps illustrate the basic steps to installing a 3- by 3-inch tongue with a standard coupler. First make



Coupler with removable cotter and locking pin, at top, shortens trailer length by hinging tongue to allow rigs to fit in tight spaces, like a garage.

room for the cut by moving any jack or winch stand:

- Measure and mark the spot for the cut (approximately 21 inches from the coupler's center; some models offer a 34-inch swing length).
- Remove or rearrange wiring and begin cutting with a metal cutting saw along the scribe line.
- Use the template provided to mark and drill ½-inch holes for safety chain bolts.
- Secure safety chains.
- Place "male casting" on trailer tongue and temporarily secure with clamp.
- Using provided punch to mark location holes on trailer tongue, top and bottom.
- Remove casting and drill eight ⅝-inch pilot holes at centermarks, one side at a time making sure to drill square to the trailer tongue. Increase holes to ¼ inch and then to ⅜ inch and again to ½ inch—it's easier than drilling a ½-inch hole to start.

- Replace male casting and tighten with provided fasteners; torque each nut to 75 foot-pounds.

- Attach swing tongue to trailer tongue by attaching or pairing mating castings together.

- Grease the hinge pin and check to verify if system works by pivoting swing tongue back and forth.

- Trailer wiring should now be re-inserted and routed back through the trailer section and ground wire should be re-attached. Take precautions to avoid sharp edges which can chafe and short the circuit.

- Place coupler over swing tongue and secure using manufacturer's hardware and torque specifications exactly as specified.

- Route the safety chains through chain guide and make sure they are long enough to reach the tow vehicle.

- Final step before towing: Open and close the swing tongue checking for proper operation, using hinge pin and hairpin cotter.

- For storage, remove cotter and locking pin, fold the tongue, and slide your rig into the garage.

The steps above may sound easy, but you may need two people when assembling. Proper alignment is critical and can be a challenge. One other important thing to remember: do not mount accessories like jacks, winch stands and spare tires to the foldaway tongue. Brake couplers can be adapted, if needed; however, these are not supplied with kits.

The Fulton swing-away is made of painted steel, which means it will rust if exposed to saltwater. Add a coat of primer and several coats of rust-resistant paint to the new tongue as you finish the job. Particularly, coat the cut edges and drilled holes.

Even with the swing-away, most boats will have to be put in at a diagonal in order to take advantage of longitudinal space, and this takes up room for your wife's car. But, it may be the only solution for lengthy boat and trailer configurations.