



Boat Buying Guide

When you're searching for your new boat, or even a used boat that's 'new' to you, here's a quick checklist of things to look for. While this guide cannot cover everything, it's a good start. Remember, if you're considering a used boat, it's a good idea to have it surveyed by a certified marine surveyor before closing the deal.

___ Capacity Plate – Is the boat built to hold all the passengers that will be on board?

___ Does the boat have the power to do what you want? Pulling skiers & tubers, Speed, etc.

___ If you'll be trailering it, can your tow vehicle pull AND stop the boat safely?

___ Construction. Is the boat NMMA certified? No wood. Full foam flotation. Solid deck and hatches...nothing feels flimsy or squishy under your feet. Boat feels solid.

___ Storage. Is there enough dry storage space to carry your safety gear, and other stuff?

___ Stability. How will the boat handle with a full load of passengers, and how does it handle in rough water?

___ Draft. How much water do you need to operate the boat safely? Especially important in shallow lakes and coastal areas.

___ Console height. When sitting at the helm can you comfortably see over the console, and is the windshield high enough to keep the wind and rain out of your face?

___ Electrical. Is the wiring harness neat and all wires marked? Is the wiring harness bunched up and looks like a bird's nest under the console? Not good. Are the buss bars and other connections easy to get to? Are the buss bars in a damp/wet compartment? Are all wires tinned at the connector?

___ Batteries. Are the batteries placed on the centerline of the boat? Are they in a wet/damp compartment or in a dry space? Are they placed above the waterline? Is there a battery switch. Is there an on-board charger for trolling motor batteries and does it charge them when the big motor is running?

___ Compass. Yes, you need one. And it needs to be mounted where you can see it AND the horizon at the same time.

___ Swim ladder. Yes you want one, if it is available for this style hull.

___ Handrails, grab bars. Are there plenty of places for passengers to hold on? Are they solid?

___ Plumbing. Are all the hoses – bilge pump, through-hulls, gas lines, etc. double-clamped? Do the through-hulls all have bronze sea-cocks?

___ Bilge access. Can you physically get to everything in the bilge? Can you get to all the fittings and connections that are located in the bilge.

___ Fuel/Water Separator. Yes, you need one. Is it easily accessible?

___ Accessory switches, breakers and fuse panel. Are all switches watertight? Fuses easy to get to. Everything well labeled.

___ Hatches. Are hatches finished on boat sides? Are the hatches in dry compartments gasketed? Do heavy hatches have gas shocks to keep the hatch open?

___ Hardware. Is all deck hardware, including hinges and cleats, made from high grade stainless steel, or is it chrome coated? Stainless is better.

___ Deck. Good non-skid under your feet?

___ Anchor locker. Is there actually enough room to get an adequate anchor and anchor chain and anchor line in there?

___ Head. Do you really need one? Probably not. Remember someone has to 'take care' of it at the end of the day, and that 'someone' is probably you.

___ Lighting. Is there adequate nighttime deck lighting to move around on the boat, without blinding the helmsman? Too much light will diminish your night vision.

___ Maintenance. How long will it really take to clean the boat at the end of the day?

___ Does it have an owner's manual that shows wiring diagrams, plumbing diagrams, all through-hull fittings, pump locations, etc?

___ Warranty. Does the manufacturer's warranty cover EVERYTHING, or just major components? Is it transferrable? Do you have to take it back to the factory for warranty work, or does the dealer do it at their shop?

Don't get starry-eyed over all the glitz and pseudo-conveniences like dozens of cup holders, automatic/hydraulically operated dining tables, wine bottle holders, carpet, and other things that don't add to the true functionality or seaworthiness of the boat. Remember, someone has to maintain and clean all that stuff. And mechanical/electrical gadgets in a marine environment are much more susceptible to corrosion and failure. In the case of boats, and their creature comfort accessories...less is more. Finally, take a test drive with the dealer or owner. Avoid buying a boat that you haven't actually experienced on the water. Try going on a day when there's a little chop on the water so you can see how it will handle in those conditions.

Again, this guide isn't the only thing you should use when seriously considering a new or used boat. Check with owners of the same model and take their opinions and experiences into account. Get some references on the dealer for service after the sale. A less expensive boat isn't necessarily a bad boat, and similarly a very expensive boat isn't always the best made boat. Do a little research and compare similar models in the same size/power/features range. Buying a boat is a lot of fun, and you want to insure that your future days on the water will be just as much fun.