



Ask Dr. Gel

by Dave Weakley



Dave Weakley is the owner of American Boat Restoration and has been keeping boaters afloat in fine trim and good repair for over 40 years.

“Email me or call me with your questions! I’ll be happy to help you out”

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What is the best time of year to buy a boat? When the right one comes along!

Questions from our readers:

“I recently purchased a 1998 Stingray with overall blistering and spider cracks. Boat seems to have been wet and I missed the defects on my own visual. I need to get back to the owner with a price on how much it will be to make the boat structurally and visually right. Can you give me an estimate?” Ben Had

“I just acquired a 1971 Glastron V177. The plywood flooring is rotten in a few areas which I am in the process of removing and replacing with 5/8” marine grade plywood. I have a couple of questions. Do I also need to replace the layer of fiberglass that was on top of the original plywood? The finish on the outside of the boat is very dull. Will a simple polishing and waxing bring back the shine? What method can I use to touch up some of the scratched areas on the hull? I prefer to do the work myself at this point.” T.B. Catskill NY

“I bought a boat on the internet; the pictures looked good and the seller said the boat was in good shape.

Unfortunately, this was not the case. Now I am facing lots of repairs and am the proud owner of a dead horse. Can you look at it and tell me if there is any hope of refurbishing it and bringing it back to life?” Shafted in NY

“Avoid buying a money pit”

Buying a boat should be a happy experience. There are a lot of very nice, solid, well kept boats for sale. Along with the good, there are some boats that are far from perfect and have serious issues. There is usually a reason why you’re getting that great deal. You can avoid buying a headache.

It’s all about structure! The structure of the boat is as important as the foundation under your house.

Before you make a purchase here’s some food for thought...

To check the structural integrity of the boat, begin at the stern. Look across the outside of the transom. There should not be any indents in the area where the out drive or engine is fastened to the boat on IO’s and out boards. Indents indicate the transom core may be soft. Next, check the transom for soundness. Using the handle end of a screwdriver, tap all over the outside of the transom. Tap lightly preventing any damage. Don’t use a hammer! You are listening for tightness; a solid tap noise will indicate a rigid core; a thud noise represents softness and/or delaminating is present. Professionals use a moisture meter, but tapping is a good indication of condition. Transom replacements are expensive. A solid transom is a must! Standing at the transom, look under the boat; check the hull - does the keel run in a straight line from the stern to the bow? Go to the bow - does the hull run true to the stern? Look all along the bottom. Is there evidence of previous repairs, blisters, cracks, or the boat being beached? Is the gel coat worn off showing the fiberglass mat? Are there signs of impact damage? Does the boat have

bottom paint on it? If that is the case and the boat has a trailer be cautious. We have stripped bottom paint off many trailered boats and damage and/or previous repairs were revealed.

Now look down each side of the boat. Check for any irregularities under the rub rail. Make sure there is a good seal all away around the boat. A boat is built in two halves and joined behind the rub rail with screws or rivets. Again, can you see any evidence of previous repairs and/or cracks? Areas most often showing cracks are along the chine (where the side of the boat meets the bottom) and the strakes (the hull body lines). The strakes provide two purposes - the way the boat tracks and they give strength to the hull. Make sure they are all in good shape.

Get in the boat. Look in the engine compartment; check the transom on the inside using the tapping method test as performed on the outside. Take a wrench and try to tighten the engine mount bolts that fasten the engine to the stringers. On outboards try tightening the bottom two mounting bolts inside the transom. If the bolts are tight, it is a good indication the transom is in good shape. If the bolts are loose in either case and all they do is spin, this means the stringer(s) / transom is soft and

Check the cockpit gunnels, look closely in the corners. Is the gelcoat cracked? Widespread cracks could be a sign of structural failure.

Make sure all hardware is firmly attached including bow eyes, cleats, handrails and bow rails. What condition is the gelcoat in around these areas?

Keep in mind the age of the boat. Is the company still in business? Give them a call! What kind and how much refurbishing does it need? Some boat builders offer parts for only 3-5 years from the manufacturer date. If rub rails, seating, striping, decals, etc. cannot be acquired, after- market parts are obtained for repairs.

It is always best to consult qualified marine repairers.

We recommend a water test and also a mechanical assessment by a certified marine tech to check engine compression, steering & shift cables, shaft, rudder, electronics, wiring, hoses, fuel lines, bilge pump, blower, lights, etc.! You may want to consider having the boat surveyed by an accredited marine surveyor who can thoroughly examine the boat.

It is cheaper to pay someone to look at the potential purchase than to have to pay for major repairs later on!



the only thing holding the engine in place is gravity. Pick up your wrench and look at another boat! If all is in good condition, check where the floor meets the transom. Is it solid? Work your way forward checking for firm flooring – no sponginess! Look inside the storage compartments and, if applicable, the ski locker(s). Is there dampness or water? Looking along the compartment sides, is moisture present? If it is a bow rider with a walk-thru, open and close the windshield. Be sure the windshield lines up and locks easily. If not, it could be out of adjustment, or worse - the floor could be soft, allowing for the dash to sag. Run away if this is the case! Check seat cushions - what kind of condition are they in? Are they well cared for? Or are they mildewed and so heavy your kids can’t pick them up? Look under the cushions for dampness, musty smell, rotted wood and missing screws. Is the seating firmly attached, are the screws tight?

Be particular in your quest to buy a pre-owned boat; most importantly, make sure the boat is strong and solid for you and your family to enjoy in the years to come!

“For Sale” on the internet – don’t be taken for a ride

Just in the last month I have spoken to four people who bought boats or almost bought a boat that was “For Sale” on the Internet. Two people bought boats with rotted transoms and stringers and one buyer bought a vessel with no hull ID #, no engine # and no trailer ID; he was told “the paper work was on its way” a while ago. He is still waiting for paper work. A good friend almost put a deposit on a pontoon boat that my son-in-law Tim found on the popular Craigslist web site. It seemed like a great deal. The perfect pontoon boat! It was the kind of boat that he had been looking to buy for a long time.

Here's the scam ad;

2007 Sun Tracker Party Barge Regency 22 with tandem axle trailer and 06 Mercury 4-stroke 115hp outboard. Pics taken after quick interior wash, so some of the carpet wasn't completely dry, those ARE NOT stains, just wet spots. This boat is next to new and has a reserve for less than half of new retail! Don't miss out on years of family fun on this top notch, well maintained gem.

Options on this boat are:*Suntracker custom fit canvas mooring cover.....great shape, no rips or tears or missing snaps.

*2007 tandem axle Trailstar trailer with brakes.....good shape, tires are strong, only used for two trips to Table Rock Lake from St. Louis. Front of trailer was bumped by a neighbor so brakes are disconnected because of a damaged actuator. Easy to replace, just haven't gotten around to it since it doesn't really need it. Other than that it is fine and will tow anywhere you need to go.

*Upgraded to 2006 4 stroke 115hp Mercury for the ease of use and reliability. Low hours since most of the time spent on a pontoon is driving to a cove and anchoring there for the day! Great motor runs as strong now as the first day on the lake. Aluminum propeller is also in good shape. The only negatives to this boat are normal wear and tear items.

Our friend emailed the seller and he replied; "The photos are recent and the boat hasn't been used since. Original owner, 198 hours, 4-stroke 115hp outboard Mercury engine, tandem axle trailer included, 12 people capacity with luxury features, full instruments (incl. compass, depth finder), and very well maintained, no mechanical problems and no electrical issues, clear title free of any liens or loans and more.

I'm out of town with business in Wyoming because I own some summer cabins here and need to do some renovating before the new season opens. To sell the boat, I'll need to travel home, so please let me know if you are seriously interested."

Our friend emailed the seller again asking its location "The boat is sitting inside our garage back in New Bedford, MA. I don't have a scheduled return to Washington by June 22nd and I have no one left back there to show the boat since my entire family lives here. I would like to use Amazon Payments to handle the transaction, check their terms over here: <http://secure.onlinepaymentsamazon.com/howitworks.htm> (check also their transaction guide to familiarize yourself with the process)

I've chosen this type of service because I flew back home to meet a buyer a week ago, he told me he had cash but it turned out he was a middleman and wanted to significantly hassle the price. This type of service would assure me the money is available and that we agreed on a price before doing the travel arrangements."

I can travel back as soon as next weekend to arrange for local pickup as soon as we start the transaction through Amazon Payments.

Sounded like a good deal and it looked nice in the photos. Seller made it sound all legit and honest even showing images of scratches and dents.

After having a conversation with my friend about where the boat was located I told Tim. He had called the seller and was told the boat was in Grand Rapids, Michigan!! Red Flag!

Something is fishy. I called my friend and said DO NOT put a deposit on this boat; sounds like a scam. They listened to my advice.

I did some more research on the same boat and found it for sale on Craigslist in South Florida. I emailed the seller. His response was exactly the same he sent to my friend. I emailed back and asked where the boat was located and he responded "Miami". This guy is a real scumbag. Makes me wonder how he can sleep at night.

Two other people as mentioned previously purchased boats through Craigslist and the boats looked great via photos and sellers said the boats were in "good" condition. Unfortunately both boats had transom and stringer deterioration so bad that the repairs would cost thousands of dollars.

Here's another situation;

"I purchased a used boat from a craigslist posting. It turned out to be a lemon. Is there any way to get my money back?"

A portion of the sellers ad read:"Date: 2010-06-24, Type: Bow rider Engine type: Single inboard/outboard Use: Fresh water Length (feet): 19.0 Engine make: Mercury Primary fuel type: Gas Beam (feet): -- Engine model: 233HP Fuel capacity (gallons): 21-30 Hull material: Fiberglass Trailer: Included The boat features a 233 HP Mercruiser outdrive. The good stuff: 233 HP engine (Ford 351) 2005, New carburetor in 2005, New tilt cylinders in 2005, Trim tabs, Like new bimini, Full canvas, Outdrive replaced in 2007, Hummingbird Excellent teak trim, Surge Brakes, New trailer tires 2008 Call 973 343-XXXX for a great deal!" Today I put it on the water, never left the dock because the engine starting taking on water and shut it off. The engine block is cracked. Is there anyway to get my money back?

There is no lemon law for boats in most states. You must look to the uniform commercial code, (UCC), Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act, and local UDAP statutes to determine if you have a good case. Based on the advertisement, there seems to be no representations about the engine. If you didn't get a written warranty, you must generally rely on written or verbal statements made by the seller to create a warranty. The seller will surely argue this is an "as-is" sale. In fact, your purchase documents may reflect just that. (A lawyer would need to review all of your documents to provide you with an answer here). However you should know that "as-is" it means you buy the boat with all its defects. Basically, if the vehicle is not warranted, you may not have a claim. I suggest you provide all the documents and information to an experienced consumer protection attorney. You can find one at www.naca.net.

Yes, there maybe some good deals out on the internet. Best to buy something nearby so you can personally inspect it. Just keep in mind if it's "too good to be true" be cautious; you maybe getting ripped off. Always get a marine survey and have a mechanic go over the motors, a few dollars during the buying process can save you thousands afterward.

Start your boat search at your local dealers, marinas and Boat Shows! Do your homework! Buy a boat through proper channels! See it, sit in it, hear it run, ride in it, drive it before you buy it!



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