

Taking a measured approach to buying a boat

Buying a boat can be an exciting and satisfying experience but as with most things in life, not without its pitfalls. A good broker will help you weigh up the pros and cons of buying new or second hand. This is usually driven by the market at the time and the state of your pocket! There are genuine bargains to be found but the old cliché “If it looks too good to be true, it probably is” often applies.



As surveyors we sometimes find that a client has fallen in love with something that could turn into an expensive nightmare. So here are a few questions you might like to ask before you **‘Offer -subject to survey’**.

Has the hull got ‘core’ below the waterline?

Balsa or foam cores have been used as the filling in the GRP deck sandwich on yachts for decades; providing stiffness with lightness and generally good reliability. Increasing numbers of sailing yachts and powerboats are now being built with cored hulls, not only in the topsides but often below the waterline. Whilst this light weight stiffness can be highly advantageous for speed it might be less attractive in the long run; a cruising vessel should expect a much longer service life than the racer. The problem is that even a minor hole in the relatively thin outer shell or the careless installation of an aftermarket skin fitting can let water into the core, leading to a multitude of problems if not noticed and



rectified immediately. If neglected a full repair may not be economically viable and your chances of selling will plummet when it’s picked up by the next surveyor.

When was the sail drive Hull Seal renewed?

Sail drive seals are incredibly reliable but they are usually only guaranteed for 7 years and are neither cheap nor



easy to replace This is the modern equivalent of **‘The Devil’** the first or **‘Garboard’** hull plank, next to the keel on a wooden vessel. Notoriously difficult to access, repair or replace: Hence **‘between the devil and the deep blue sea’**.

Are there coding issues?

If you are considering recovering some of your costs by operating your new vessel commercially under UK flag, it will need to be ‘Coded’ via the Maritime and Coast Guard Agency’s (MCA) codes of practice for commercial vessels. There are a number of structural and design

issues which might prove problematic. These may include freeboard, stability, in-board petrol engines and structural strength assessment. It’s best to know these things up front; an authorised coding surveyor’s early input can be extremely useful. It’s also good to know the vessel meets these safety standards, which also protect you and yours.

Has the vessel been treated for osmosis?

Significant osmotic effects are quite unusual on newer vessels. This is primarily due to advances in gelcoat and laminate resins over the last 10 years. However do be alert for the older vessel that has spent its life in fresh or tropical waters as this can accelerate such effects. It’s probably true to say that no boat has sunk even from a rash of blisters. Your surveyor’s diligence will give you an indication of moisture within the hull and provide guidance based on age, usage, laminate etc. If the boat is old she may well have been treated or will be due for it, this can be factored into the price negotiations. However older vessels with a few surface blisters can provide a cheap and reliable means of getting afloat without needing expensive treatment.

What about the rig?

With sailboats a significant part of the value is in the sails and rigging. Check the age and condition of sails. Many 10 year old boats have the original sails. This is not necessarily a bad thing but sails do wear out with time and use; a new suite of sails on a 10 year old 35 footer can represent a significant proportion of the purchase price.



Your sailing rig is a safety critical system which must be in good order and well tuned, neglect it at your peril. Insurers usually require the standing rigging to be replaced every 10-12 years for pleasure use, with the interval reducing rapidly for serious sailing, racing or charter. Ask when the standing rigging was last renewed and if there has been a recent aloft rig and spar check.

What is the age, condition and service history of the engines and outdrives?

Again this can represent a significant proportion of the value; particularly for power boats. Sooner or later all machinery will need replacement but regular and professional servicing can greatly enhance its life and reliability.



Do I need a professional survey?

If ever there's a time to identify problems, it's before you buy. A diligent survey will keep you in the driving seat for purchase negotiations and ensure peace of mind. The cumulative cost of even minor repairs or replacements will often eclipse the survey fee.

I hope these tips will be useful and wish you luck finding your perfect boat!

Richard Linford MSc BSc CEng MIET
Authorised MCA Coding examiner

Richard Linford is principal surveyor for
Blue Peninsula Marine Ltd

Yacht & Commercial Vessel Surveyors

- Pre-purchase condition
- Insurance
- Valuation
- MCA Code Compliance
- Tonnage measurement
- Damage, repair, refit & new build consultancy
- Expert witness & mediation

For a professional and comprehensive service:

Telephone: 01752 862488

Mobile : 0771 880 8696

Fax: 01752 863545

Email: info@boatsurveyplymouth.co.uk

121 Church Road, Wembury, Devon PL9 0LB