

First Edition

# THE BOAT BUYING COLLECTION



Viewing Boats to Buy  
Checklists for personal inspections



*Kimberly Ann Brown*

# **The Boat Owner's Collection: Viewing Boats to Buy**

## ***A checklist for personal inspections***

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## Viewing Boats To Buy

The time has come to view some boats – yippie! Buying a boat can be exciting, fun and exhilarating. It can also be scary, overwhelming and stressful.

It's important to understand that buying a boat is not about finding one you like and then leaving it up to a surveyor to tell you if it's good or not! Even if you're not a seasoned boat person it's imperative that you do your own inspection before making further commitments.

If you don't dig into the details it's very possible that unbeknown to you, you'll buy a boat that needs thousands of work right from the start!

### **The objectives of viewing a boat are as follows:**

- To determine if you, and any other stakeholder, like the boat
- To ensure the boat meets as many of your requirements as possible
- To pre-inspect the boat ensuring there are no deal breakers negating the need for a professional survey. To also look for problematic areas that might warrant further investigation and/or a reduction on the price of the boat

Some issues should raise massive red flags like a hull with moisture/osmosis problems, doubtful keel bolts or rot around the chain plates. Most problems, as long as you know what they are **and** the cost involved in fixing them, however, don't have to result in a dead deal.

The key is to remind yourself that you don't know what you don't know. While viewing a boat, take pictures of anything that looks suspect and make a note of the brand and model. You'd be surprised at how expensive simple things, like exhaust hoses, pumps, rigging gear and even ceiling lights, can be.

Also, make a note of the make, model, and year of anything that has to be serviced and maintained. Jot down the engine, generator, navigation system, and so forth.

When you return home, you can do some research to understand some of the costs involved in replacing and servicing items. Furthermore, it's a good exercise to look up known problems that a particular item might have. For example, some engines have particular failures after X amount of hours. If the boat you're buying has that engine, you'll want to know when the engine might fail and the cost of fixing it.

Also, if you've never purchased a used boat before it may come as a surprise as to what is sold with the boat. Most boats are sold with soft furnishings, bedding, pots, pans, spare parts, tools, safety equipment, dive equipment and more. Only after viewing a boat will you truly understand everything that's being sold.

*Important:* This checklist is only a guide and is not designed to replace a professional survey and sea trial. Furthermore, you don't have to follow every suggestion. Use what works for you and pass over what doesn't. If the boat is in the water, rather than on the hard, you won't be able to inspect the hull (yet) so disregard that section. If you're happy with the viewing and have already started financial discussions, the next step is to commission a survey and take the boat out for a sea trial.

## **Helpful things you can bring with you to the viewing:**

- Your phone for taking photos and videos (make sure you clear the storage space for photos and videos)
  
- Flashlight
  
- Inspection mirror (helpful to look around the engine)
  
- Multimeter (if you know how to use one and are comfortable with testing electricity)
  
- Moisture meter (Used to check the moisture level in the deck/hull. If you don't have one either borrow one or buy one but again, you'll need to understand how to use it)
  
- Any friend or family you have that's an expert at boats, engines, and/or rigging
  
- Magnet (if a magnet sticks to stainless steel hardware it isn't marine grade stainless... it's a cheap alternative)
  
- Your list of requirements
  
- A copy of the boat sale specifications (Sale price, what's included in the sale, etc.)
  
- A copy of the boat owners original survey (Collected previous to viewing if possible. Use this to see what work has been done during the owner's rein)

## **Viewing the boat on the hard or lifted out**

If the boat is in the water, use this list once the boat is lifted out for inspection. Refer to the Boat Visual Diagram pages towards the back of this pack to note specific locations of items you may have concerns over.

- Overall.** Take several photos around the boat. Get one of the keel, drive shaft/sail drive, rudder, propeller, bowthruster and any other item on the hull.
  
- Propeller.** Inspect the propeller. Make sure it's clean (demonstrates the owner took care of the boat), rotates freely and that it doesn't have any play. If it jiggles there could be an issue with the cutless bearing.
  
- Drive shaft.** Look at the drive shaft – make sure there are no areas of pink or copper colored discoloration. If there is, it's a sign of dezincification. Dezincification is where zinc is removed from the alloy, leaving behind a porous, copper-rich structure that has little mechanical strength.
  
- Rudder.** Move the rudder back and forth to make sure it moves freely but without any significant play. If it's wobbly the bearings or bushings may need to be changed. (Note: if it doesn't move at all, it could be locked or tied down).
  
- Keel.** Look at the seam of the keel along the hull joint. It should not be seeping with discoloration or water. This is an indication that the keel bolts could be loose.
  
- Hull.** Look for any areas that stand out or do not follow a smooth line. These areas could be indication of previous damage or bad design. Also, find out how long the boat has been on the hard and then use your moisture meter to determine what state the hull is in.



## **Inspecting the boat – on the deck**

*Reminder:* While walking around the deck, take a picture of anything that looks weak, rusty or like it's about to crumble (UV damage) so you can later look up the replacement cost and consider if the cost of the boat reflects the cost of replacements.

- Teak.** Make sure the Sikaflex, or black lining between the teak, is all in place. Also, note if the teak has been sanded down and how much is left. There is a point where the teak cannot be sanded down any further and will need to be replaced. Replacing Sikaflex is a painstaking job that takes weeks if not months. An entire teak deck is massively expensive to replace.
  
- Deck.** Use the moisture meter to check out the moisture levels.
  
- Chain plates** (plates that fix the rigging to the deck). Inspect the area around the chain plates to make sure they look solid. The amount of tension held in this area is massive.
  
- Winches.** Rotate the winches to make sure they spin freely. Also wiggle them to make sure they don't move or wobble.
  
- Running rigging.** Look for chafing – especially in the halyards.
  
- Blocks and sheaves.** Make sure they rotate.
  
- Rigging.** Take a picture of everything. You can later zoom in and inspect the photos as best as possible. Look for loose wires, cracks and any rough patches on boom and mast. Open and close brakes to ensure they move smoothly. Look for UV damage on all deck fittings.



**Sails.** Look for the areas that see the most sun and scratch the threads with your fingernail. If they break, the sail might be in poor condition. Same goes for any canvas items. New sails are very costly.

**Lifelines.** Look for rust or corrosion.

**Anchor.** Check out the anchor and anchor locker. Look for rust or galvanization issues.

**Safety equipment.** Make a note of what's on board (life raft, MOB equipment) and when it was last serviced or how old it is. If you're planning on joining an organized long-passage outfit, like the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC), there are very specific safety requirements. Failing to have the correct equipment can cost thousands of dollars.

**Lockers.** Make sure they're tidy and note the amount of space.

**Notes:**

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## **Inspecting the boat - inside**

*Reminder:* While walking around the boat, take a picture of anything that looks like it's old or in a bad state. Later, when you get home, you can research the replacement cost.

- Bilge.** Pull up some floorboards and inspect the bilge. Does it look clean and smell good?
  
- Seacocks.** Find and move some seacock handles back and forth. If they move easily that indicates the current owner has been exercising them often. Boat owners should exercise seacocks every month but many fail to do it. You want to see handles that only turn vertically to be in line (open), or at a right angle (closed) with the valve. Older twist valves will need to be replaced. If possible, have someone outside the boat look at the seacock while you exercise it – they'll need to use a flashlight and inspect for any corrosion. Also look for any pink copper coloring – that can be a sign of dezincification.
  
- Hoses.** Look for cracking, oozing, and/or rust spots. Also inspect hose clamps and the seam between the hose and the seacock, engine, etc.
  
- Engine.** If possible, do a 'WOBBLES' check on the engine. W = Water, O = Oil, B = Belt, B = Batteries, L = Leaks, E = Electricity and S = Strainers. Check the oil filler cap – if it has water dripping from it, it can be an indication that there's water in the crankcase. Also use a paper towel or white rag to rub under the engine. The bilge might have been cleaned out but if the current owner is trying to hide leaks, they'll usually forget to clean under the engine. Also, make sure to look at the motor mounts – give the engine a bit of a push to make sure it's solid in its place. Make a note of the engine type and model so you can look up known problems later.

- Generator.** Same as engine.
  
- Steering.** Using a flashlight look at the steering cable. Ensure it's greased, doesn't have any play and is devoid of "meat hooks" on the cable.
  
- Keel Bolts.** Inspect any that are easy to get to. Make sure they look clean and do not have any rust stains around them.
  
- Underside of the Deck.** If possible, look above the headlining's to check out any through-deck bolts. If you see brown drips or stains dripping from the bolts it's a sign of a rotting deck. (Note: it's often not easy to get the headlining's off so only do this if it's inappropriate. Open some cupboards or closets to look for bolts first).
  
- Portlights and windows.** Look for signs of leaking. Open and close windows and hatches to make sure they actually do open and close!
  
- Heads.** Test the flushing unit or pump (if water is in the system). Look for visible leaks. Check black water pipes to determine if they're in need of a change. They'll become discolored and smell. Test sink and shower water pressure. Test gray water drain pumps.
  
- Galley.** Take pictures and make notes of appliances, space, fridge space, freezer space, condition of oven, extras (ice maker, dishwasher, filtered tap, microwave), headroom and layout. Test any pumps.
  
- Berths.** Take pictures, note layout, headroom, storage space, etc. Test the beds – can you fit in them, are they comfortable? Are there lee cloths (fabric panels that hold you in during stormy seas) under the mattresses?

- Electrics.** Turn things on that don't require engine/water cooling (if on the hard). Is everything working? Lights, fans, pumps, plotters, VHF, etc. If possible, check navigation units to see if they're all working. Make a note of the systems to check replacement/upgrade costs.
  
- Safety.** What safety equipment is on board and when was it last serviced. Including life jackets, harnesses, fire extinguishers, carbon monoxide detector, fire blanket, EPIRB.
  
- Entertainment.** What's the sound system like? Is there a TV, movie player, etc?
  
- General all around things to consider:** Smells - note the smell of mold, gray water (sink/shower) or black water (body waste). Sounds – listen for the sound of pumps, refrigeration noise, how loud the generator is, air con/heating and so forth. Discoloration – look in corners for water damage/leak trails. Also note soft furnishings, curtains, pillows and sheets. All these items are generally custom made jobs so the cost to buy and/or replace them can add up.

**Notes:**

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## **The boat viewing – an outsiders perspective**

If the boat is currently berthed at a marina or within walking distance to other boat owners, walk around the dock and ask people if they know they know the current boat owner. If they do, consider asking some or all of the following questions:

- How often was the owner on the boat?
  
- Did he or she take the boat out often or did it stay mostly in the marina?
  
- When bad weather was forecasted did the boat owner, or a helper, visit the boat to ensure more lines were put out?
  
- Did you hear of any problems the boat owner had with the boat?
  
- Do you know why he or she is selling the boat?
  
- How long has the boat been up for sale?
  
- Notes:

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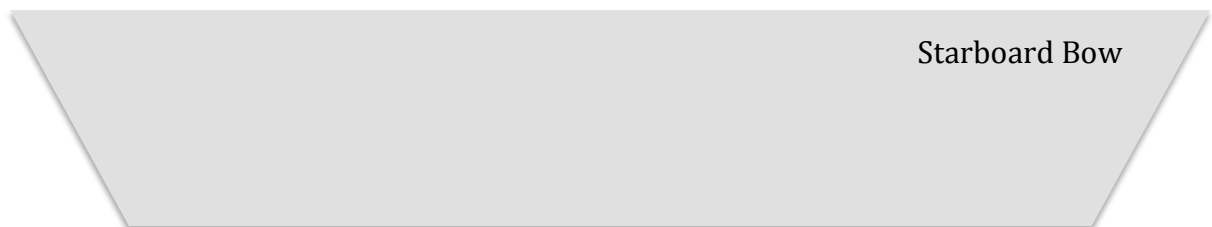
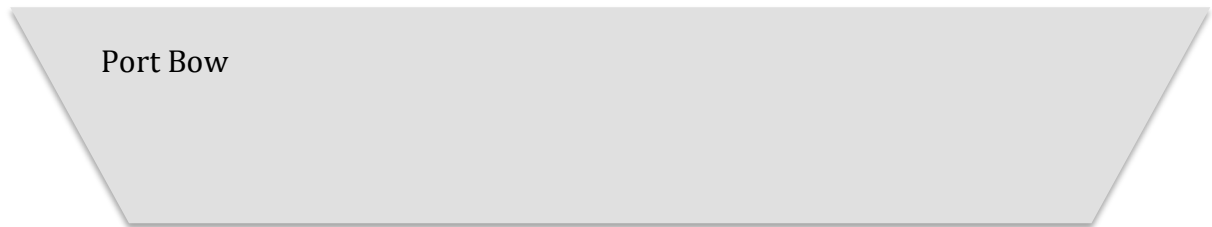
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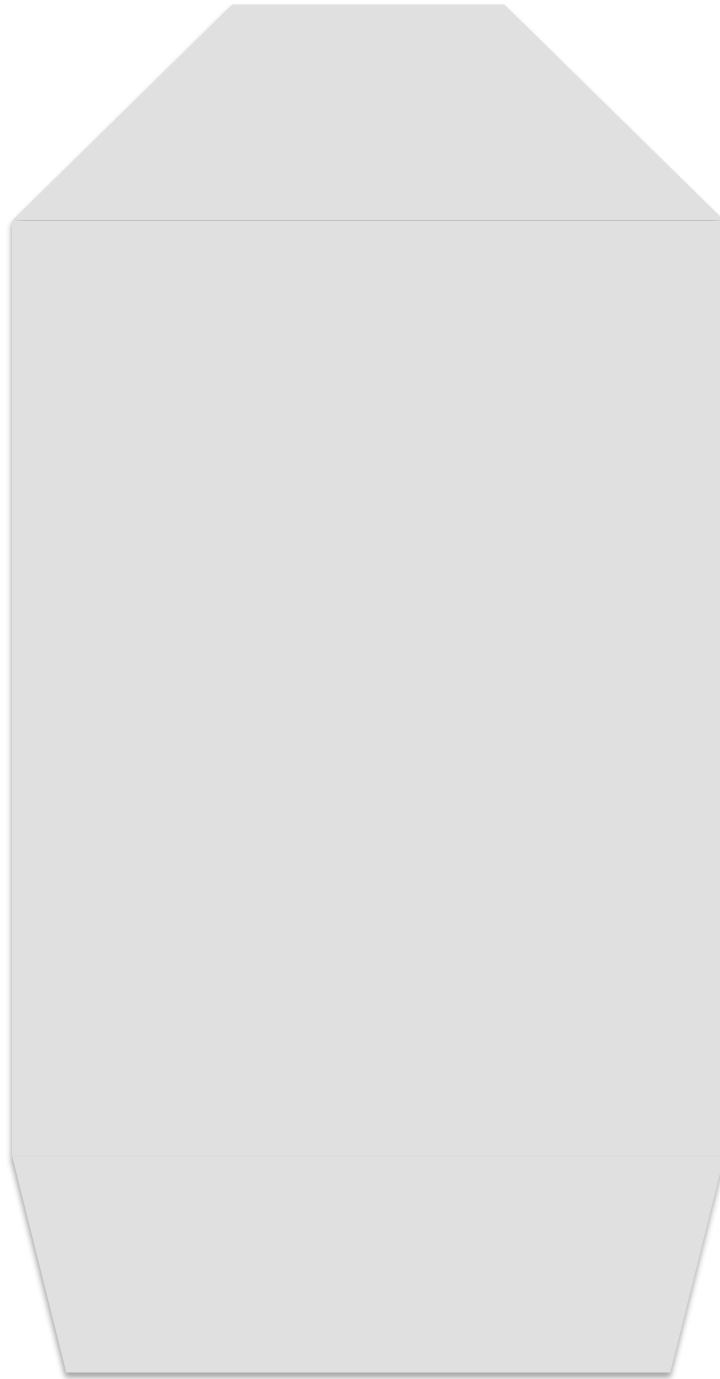
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## Boat Diagram Visuals

- External side view of the boat.** Use these diagrams to note any issues or concerns you find while walking around the boat. Draw a sketch of the boat rigging, keel, items on the hull; perhaps blemishes, cracks or suspect markings.



- Deck of the boat.** Do a sketch of the top deck highlighting anything you might have a question about. Note any issues or concerns you find while walking on the deck.





- Inside of the boat.** While walking around the boat, note any issues or concerns you find in conjunction with using the checklist.

