

First Edition

THE BOAT OWNERS COLLECTION



Choosing A Dinghy A checklist for selecting the best one



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The Boat Owner's Collection: Choosing a Dinghy

A checklist for selecting the best one

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Cover/photo credit: Britican's dinghy with UV covers. Photo taken in Charleston Harbor Marina, Charleston, South Carolina, USA

How can you get the best tender or dinghy for your sailboat?

A dinghy, or tender, is an important piece of kit. It will connect you from sea to land when you're at anchor and from time to time, a dinghy will come in hand at a marina (often a dinghy ride to the bathroom is quicker than walking)!

Picking the right dinghy for you and your boat depends on a variety of factors. For example, some tenders look cool but lack in space for groceries. Other tenders are inexpensive but lack in stability.

The objectives of using this checklist are as follows:

- To solidify your main goals for using the dinghy
- To gain an understanding about the varieties of dinghies available
- To create a simple specification for a dinghy that best suits your requirements
- To know what to look for when purchasing a used dinghy

What are you going to use the dingy for?

- Going to and from the boat to shore?
 - Will you be transporting provisions and need a generous amount of open space? (center steering columns reduce holding space)
 - Will you be picking up guests and their comfort is important? (having seats rather than sitting on the edge are more accommodating. In some dinghies you get wet and in others you get very wet)
 - Will you be docking up to a jetty or having to pull the boat up onto the sand? (weight of the boat and outboard need to be considered)

- To inspect and clean the hull of your sailboat? (stability might be important)

- To head out to dive spots? (you'll need ample room for all the equipment)
- To go on adventures that your larger boat doesn't allow for? (might want to consider how fast the engine goes)
- To take the children out knee boarding, tubing and water skiing? (needs to go over 15 mph)
- To look awesome while you motor around in your dinghy? (Dinghy's with a steering column look impressive, but ask anyone that owns one and they'll tell you they wish they had more space)

Variations to consider prior to looking for a dinghy

Instructions: use the 'Dinghy Specification Sheet' following this checklist for notes.

- Do you want a new or used dinghy? New dinghies are generally more expensive but you'll have the privilege of being the first owner. You'll also gain the added luxury of a warranty. On the other hand, amazing deals can be had by buying a used dinghy. Usually you can pick a high quality used tender up for a fraction of the cost of a new one.
- Cost? There are new dinghies that start around \$2,000 and go up to \$50,000+ (Google, 'Williams Jet Tenders'). For a used tender you might even find one for free to a good home. How much can you allocate to pay for a dinghy?
- Capacity requirements – how many people will use the dinghy regularly? If it's just you and your partner that will be using the dinghy on a regular basis, get one that suits the needs of two people, not six. It will only be two of you that have to pull it up a beach, hoist it out of the water and maintain it. Bigger is not better. When family or friends visit you can always take a couple trips if need be.

- Layout? Center console with steering wheel versus open plan with outboard arm? As mentioned above center console dinghies look impressive but will they meet your requirements?

- Consider your choice of inflatable, semi-inflatable and hard. Inflatable boats allow the whole unit to be inflated and deflated. This allows for a tender that can be reduced in size and stored, potentially in a locker rather than on deck. On the negative side, fully inflatable boats are not very stable, take a while to plane and are more prone to tearing/popping and are often a wet ride. Semi-inflatable dinghies are those with a hard bottom and inflatable sides (the most common option amongst full time cruiser). This type of tender is more stable and less likely to tear/pop however you can only reduce its size to the area of the hard bottom. Storage generally needs to be with davits, on deck or leave it in the water and tow. With a hard dinghy, they are the most stable and the safest option – they won't pop and sink! Hard dinghies, however can be difficult to store and heavy. There are some hard dinghies on the market that are collapsible (check out Porta-Bote).

- Is there a forward locker? Is it lockable? Within your locker you might want to store an anchor and rope, First Aid Kit, and pump (if you have an inflatable). Some days you might want to throw loose items like your sunglasses, sunscreen or hat in the locker.

- Is there a space or the mechanism for a chain lock to be attached to the boat and motor? In some areas and several countries you will not have a dinghy if you leave it unlocked. Chain over wire rope is recommended. We thread a chain through a fastener on the internal hard floor and then through the motor. Once the boat and motor are chained, we attach the chain to an immovable object like a dinghy dock or tree.

☐ Stowage options

- Davits. If you already have davits on the boat, you'll need hooks attached to the dingy. When getting quotes or looking for used dinghies keep this requirement, or added cost, in mind. Also keep in mind that davits have weight restrictions.
- Foreword deck. Will you set the dingy in a cradle? If not, will the outboard have to come off before stowing? If the outboard does have to come off, how are you going to lift it and where will you store the outboard?
- Collapsible. Once it's collapsed where will you stow it?
- Tow behind the boat. Keep in mind that towing a boat behind your sailboat can reduce your speed by one to two knots. Furthermore, it can make a distracting noise. Note that dinghies with jet engines cannot sit in the water or be towed. They must be raised when not in use.

☐ Comes with an outboard or equipped with a jet engine?

- Maximum speed? If you want to explore the coast and rivers in addition to making it to land before sunset, consider the maximum speed your engine will go. If you're caught in a downpour are you happy to slowly make your way to the boat or do you want to get aboard quickly? When you forget your wallet on board and have to return from land are you okay with it taking a long time?
- Will you need to lift the outboard or take it off the dingy from time to time? If yes, how are you going to do that? You might be able to lift the engine when it's on land but getting an outboard off a dinghy at sea is a different kettle of fish. Simply attaching a halyard and hoisting doesn't always work. You can get an engine light enough to lift or attach a crane mechanism to the aft of your sailboat to help hoist it to a side mounted holding space.
- Is there a mount on your boat to put the outboard when it's not on the dingy? Or if the dingy gets punctured and you need to remove the outboard before it sinks, is there a place to store it?

Dinghy Specification Sheet

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| New or used | |
| Budget | |
| Capacity requirements | |
| Layout | |
| Inflatable, semi-inflatable, hard | |
| Forward locker | |
| Chain and lock mechanism | |
| Davit clips or cradle required | |
| Outboard requirements | |
| Extras | |

Things to Look For During a Used Dingy Inspection

- Visually inspect top and bottom for wear and tear
- Ask what repairs have been made and by whom (owner or professional)
- Ask what the service history is and if there's any record of it
- Check that oars and any seats are present and in good condition
- Open any lockers to inspect – make sure there's no water
- Make sure the plug is present and in good condition
- Inspect any ropes for fraying
- What is included with the sale of the dingy?
 - Anchor
 - Fender(s)
 - Covers (for the dingy, gas tank, outboard engine)
 - Foot pump to inflate dingy
- Does an outboard or engine come with the boat?
 - Check engine – give it a test drive if possible. Make sure it starts easily.
Check anodes.
 - Is the engine maintenance guide available? (From owner or online)?
 - Is there an engine service history?

Tips and other information dinghy related information

- A hard bottom dingy is much easier to get in and out of than a soft bottom

- Aluminum is lighter than plastic

- Covers can be purchased that go over the whole boat or there's the option of affixing a cover onto the upper tubing area which will prolong the life of a tender up to 5 years by reducing UV deterioration

- Always make sure to have a dingy repair kit on the boat – hidden nails on docks can easily puncture a dingy. Surprisingly, repair kits can be hard to find – even in major sailing destinations

- In areas with tides and waves an anchor is often necessary to keep a dingy from bashing into a dock or to prevent it from going under a dock. If you notice other dinghies using an anchor, use your anchor!

- Have a plan on how you'll remove your outboard from the dingy and store it on your boat. It's possible that the dingy get's popped and you have to remove the outboard so the boat doesn't sink or if a storm is coming, it might be safer to have the outboard on the boat. Using a halyard to hoist a heavy outboard is not an easy task and in some cases it's impossible.

- Note that many locks have a brass inner locking element. Brass corrodes extremely quickly in salt water. When possible, make sure to get a fully stainless steal lock. Otherwise, you'll be buying new locks every few months.

- Boats made form Hypalon will last up to 10 years whereas boats made from PVC will look rough even after a few years.

- ❑ On semi-inflatable boats the plastic seam that fastens the hard part of the bottom of the boat to the inflatable area can easily be replaced by professionals. This area can often get rubbed down due to hauling the boat up onto sand and rocks. It's not an expensive fix if the boat otherwise looks in good condition.

- ❑ There's a debate about publishing the name of your sailboat on the dinghy. On one hand, if you dinghy gets blown out to sea and lands in another area someone will be able to identify the boat. On the other hand, in countries where crime is high, your dinghy parked at a dinghy dock or on a beach indicates that the sailboat might be empty. Criminals might take advantage of a sailboat known to be unattended. I've known some boaters to keep their dinghy nameless but put their contact details in the locker of the dinghy. If a genuine person finds the missing tender, they'll find the number, make a phone call and help to return the boat.

- ❑ There's a fin mechanism that can be added to outboard motors enabling the boat to plane faster. By installing this fin you'll have a more comfortable ride and reduce fuel consumption.

- ❑ The rundown on outboards: The 4 stroke models are heavier, more expensive and can require complex maintenance. On the positive side, the 4 stroke engine uses less fuel, requires less maintenance and is better for the environment. You can source a 4 stroke almost anywhere. With a 2 stroke, they are lighter, you get more power, they're more reliable but they're dirtier and harder to source in certain areas.

If you have any suggestions, additions or improvements to *Choosing A Dinghy* guide, please email them to me at: Kim@SailingBritican.com and I'll add them to future updates.