



newtosailing



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Boat buying

Buying your first boat can be daunting. **Rupert Holmes** guides you through the process... after all, it's shopping for fun!

Before buying a boat it's important to develop a clear idea as to the kind of sailing you want to do. Do you want friendly racing at a small family-oriented club? Is mixing with the hot shots on the open meeting circuit more your thing? Or do you simply want to potter with only an occasional perhaps informal race thrown in?

Who you will be sailing with is also an important factor – crew weight is a crucial element, for instance, in the choice of most dinghy and keelboat classes. Once you can answer these questions, it's possible to assess the key features you need from a boat.

Trying out as many different boats as possible

before making a purchase will be valuable experience and help give a clear idea of what will suit you best. With this experience under your belt, you'll then be able to choose your first boat from a knowledgeable position.

Many clubs and boat builders have open days and class associations can provide opportunities to get afloat in their boats. You may even decide that buying a boat is not yet the right move for you, especially if you're relatively new to sailing – there are many ways in which to enjoy sailing and racing at all levels without splashing out on buying your own vessel.

Dinghy and keelboat sailors will probably have a good idea of where they will keep their new craft even before searching for the boat. A key reason for this is that the choice of vessel is driven by the selection of classes sailed at your local club. Alternatively, the club maybe chosen because that's where the class you want to sail is raced. Either way, all that you need to do is check that there's space in the dinghy park and that there's

no waiting list for membership if you're joining a club as a new member.

It's becoming increasingly hard to find a spot to keep a yacht of any appreciable size, especially in the more popular parts of the UK, unless you have very deep pockets. Locating a mooring – or dry sailing facility – should therefore be a priority before you commit to buying your boat.

Some lucky boat buyers have the decision of what type of boat to buy narrowed down to a short list by factors such as the classes sailed at their local club, or by the wish to engage in one-design racing. If this is the case, prospective owners are likely to have sailed their desired class before buying and will be familiar with many of its virtues and pitfalls.

How much to budget

It's important to be aware that the purchase cost of the boat needs to be a fair bit lower than the pool of money that you have available to spend up front. These initial costs will include insurance, extra kit or repairs needed to bring the boat up to top condition, additional personal gear, as well as the first year's club fees, or mooring charges.

When drawing up a budget it's important to include a generous allowance for unexpected contingencies – most boat owners underestimate the total costs involved, some by a considerable margin. The replacement value of accessories such as covers, trailer and trolleys, deck gear and sails can greatly exceed the value of the hull and rig, especially for older dinghies. Therefore, when



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boats – the class association website is a good place to start. Doing this before you even start viewing boats will enable you to distinguish a sound boat from one that needs work more easily.

Try to systematically investigate the condition of any boats you look at. Start by checking the cosmetic condition of hull and deck, including gel coat, paint or other coating. Also look for evidence of structural damage such as impact damage, or significant cracks in high stress areas, including chainplates, deck fittings, the hull-deck

Above Many builders organise trial sail days so you can have a go in different classes you are interested in buying.

“ Beware the temptation to buy a dinghy and tow it home – if you have an accident en route it won't be covered ”

comparing the price of individual boats it's important to do so on a like-for-like basis, taking into account any extra expenditure needed to get each boat into full racing trim. This exercise will frequently show that a seemingly expensive boat that's well equipped, with plenty of recent gear, is in fact a genuine bargain.

Finance

Although many lower-value boats are funded by cash standard high street loans, it's worth investigating marine mortgages for vessels of a higher value. These are loans secured on the boat and tend to offer more flexibility than standard 'high street' packages. They are available from as little as £5,000, up to £25 million! In addition, marine finance companies will help to smooth the process for boat buyers as they have just as much interest in checking clean title, valuation and VAT status as the purchaser.

Most marine mortgages are over a 10-year period, although five and 15-year terms are also available, and there are few, if any, penalties for early repayment of the loan.

Once you've decided on a short list of type or class of boat to look for, if buying second-hand research any typical faults found on second-hand

joint and so on. It's worth taking along someone who knows a lot more about boats than you if you're inexperienced.

A trial sail will tell you whether the running rigging and deck gear works well – make sure you test them all out – as well as enabling you to make a good assessment of the condition of the sails.

In the case of larger boats a survey is also essential. This applies equally to both new and second-hand yachts – on a new boat it will give you peace of mind and ensure everything is how it should be at handover. For older yachts, especially those over 20 years old, it can be difficult to get comprehensive insurance without a recent survey.

Shared ownership

Sharing a boat helps stretch a budget and also means that maintenance and other responsibilities can be divided. For instance, the price of two new Lasers will buy a Laser 4000, or a group of four or five people could chip in £5-6,000 each to buy a Sigma 33 or similar for an offshore racing campaign.

Sharing a boat is more common than many people realise, and is very successful in the vast majority of cases. However, anyone who goes down this route should make certain they do so on a formal basis, especially if large sums of money



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Above Class associations are a good starting point, and can often help highlight common problems to look for in second-hand boats.

or responsibility are involved. RYA members can download a sample contract for shared ownership from the Association's website. One important benefit of this is that it clearly defines the ground rules by which all parties must abide, which reduces the chances of misunderstandings and disagreements at a later date.

A more unusual option is offered by Lagoon Watersports in Brighton, which claims to be the first operation in the UK to have offered a gym-style membership. For around £40 per month you can have dinghies and windsurfers based on Hove Lagoon, and Stratos Keels from Brighton Marina, including twice-weekly racing clinics.

SailTime's concept of fractional ownership has proved popular and the company is continuing to expand rapidly. Each yacht is 'shared' by seven members and one owner member, who each are guaranteed a minimum of three and a half days' sailing every month for a fixed fee. Although the boats are available for specific events such as the Round the Island Race, to date SailTime has no race-specification vessels in its fleet.

Legal matters

Once you've found a suitable boat, the next stage is to make an offer. In the case of a bigger boat this will need to be subject to a survey, valuation, evidence of title, and finance approval (if appropriate). You will also need an original VAT paid invoice if the purchase price is inclusive of VAT.

A written contract is vital when large sums of money are involved – it should be signed by both parties, and is usually accompanied by a 10 per cent deposit – once the sale price has been agreed. The RYA has a standard contract that members can download via the association's website, although if the boat is sold through an Yacht Brokers Designers and Surveyors Association broker, then the YBDSA standard contract will normally be used. You should expect a new boat to be sold under the British Marine Federation's standard contract.

There are a few potential legal pitfalls of which purchasers may fall foul when buying a boat. Firstly, does the person selling the vessel actually

own it? Are there any encumbrances, or other charges such as unpaid mooring fees, repair bills, loans or marine mortgages against it?

The sale of a dinghy is usually a much less formal process than that of a yacht. However it's equally important to do as much as possible to check that the person you're buying from does actually own the boat. A case on the Isle of Wight a couple of years ago demonstrates the extent to which fraudsters are happy to operate in potentially very public situations. Three boats were 'sold' from a club dinghy park, by someone who didn't own them. The crime wasn't noticed until the new 'owners' had taken the boats away and one of the rightful owners discovered his boat missing and informed the police.

Checking stolen boat websites such as www.stolenboats.org.uk to find out whether the boat you're considering has been reported stolen is a sensible precaution. Note that as well as checking the sail number you should also check the hull number – usually found on the transom – matches this. The RYA recommends that you should check with the vendor's sailing club, mooring provider or boatyard for written confirmation that the vendor does indeed own the boat. The association also recommends checking title by writing to the marine finance houses, and the vendor's insurance company to obtain, duplicate certificates going back five years.

When it's yours!

Insurance is the first essential to arrange when buying a boat. Beware of the temptation to buy a dinghy, hitch it up to the back of the car and immediately tow it home – if you have an accident en route damage to the boat won't be covered. Equally, if it's left in a dinghy park and it's stolen before cover is arranged you also have a problem.

If you're buying a yacht and paying a substantial deposit before completion of the purchase, it's a good idea to have a policy in place at the time at which the deposit is paid.

Once you've completed the purchase of your craft, it can be very tempting to replace existing deck systems and layouts with your own ideas. It's often worthwhile resisting this temptation until you have a little experience of the class – it's easy to get carried away on a wave of enthusiasm, before you've really learnt what will do the job most effectively. In the first instance it's often best to just make sure the existing gear works effectively – chafed control lines, jammers that don't operate properly, and any other clearly defective items should be replaced, and the same goes for low-grade systems with excess friction.

If your new boat is your first experience of the particular class, then it's worth checking the class association website for useful information. The Lark class, for instance, has excellent sections covering getting an older boat up to its full speed potential, as well as a tuning guide that's relevant to all owners.

Similar advice applies to buying new sails – you'll gain a much greater benefit from new cloth once you've got the boat handling and crew work up to speed. ■

Further information

www.yachtsandyachting.com
www.rya.org.uk
www.sailing.org