

Date: November 2009
Contact: Renee Mason Advertising/Public Relations
(712) 364-3365, rmason@midwestindustries.com

Launching dos and don'ts save time, headaches

If you're like a lot of boaters heading to the lake this weekend, launching and retrieving your boat at the ramp can be the most difficult aspect — especially if the ramps are crowded and you have an audience. The key to stress-free launching is a combination of planning, coordination and a little practice.

Here is a boater's guide to launch ramp "Do's and Don'ts" from the Information Bureau at Midwest Industries, manufacturer of ShoreLand'r trailers. These simple rules will save time, headaches and perhaps some embarrassment for you. Your fellow boaters will also appreciate your efficiency.

Before you launch. Before getting into line or approaching the ramp, take time to transfer coolers, fishing gear, safety equipment, anchors and other essentials from your tow vehicle to the boat. Remove tie-downs securing the boat to the trailer, but make sure the winch line is still hooked to the bow eye.

This is also a good time to install and tighten all drain plugs, especially the ones at the bottom of the transom. Hook up fuel lines, if necessary, and pressurize the fuel line with a couple of pumps on the primer bulb. Check batteries to make sure they're charged.

If your trailer lights are not waterproof, unplug the wiring harness between the trailer and your tow vehicle. This will prevent damage to your lights and blown fuses. Raise your

outboard or stern drive so they won't scrape on the ramp. Next, be sure to tie at least one and preferably two docking lines to the boat, so that someone helping you will be able to control the boat after it's launched.

The last thing to do before getting in line is to take a few minutes to check out the launch ramp. Take note of how steep the ramp is, how deep the water is and whether the ramp itself is dry or slick with algae. Is there a dock to tie up to after launching or will it be necessary to beach or anchor your boat?

Check out the parking area, too. Some facilities have enough room for your vehicle and trailers. Others require that you park the trailer in one area and your vehicle in another. Knowing this in advance can save time and confusion.

Launching your boat. When it's your turn to launch, now is not the time to practice your backing skills. You should have already spent a few hours in an empty parking lot polishing your skills beforehand. If someone in your party is more experienced, let them handle the launching. On multiple-lane ramps be sure to stay in your lane. If it's your first time at the lake this season, don't get discouraged if you're a little rusty. Just stay cool, go slowly and keep your sense of humor.

Experience will tell you how far to back down into the water. A good rule of thumb is to stop when the step in front of the trailer fender is even with the water level. Set the parking brake on the vehicle and you're ready to launch.

A properly fitted trailer will allow a boat to launch itself. But be careful on steep ramps because a roller-trailer might launch your boat before you're ready. To begin, grab the winch handle before switching the ratchet mechanism to "Off" and then let out line.

Otherwise you may not be able to stop the spinning handle before the boat takes out all the line.

Sometimes you may need to give the boat a push to get it started, but if you're still having trouble, try backing the trailer another foot into the water. In some cases if the ramp isn't too steep, you may want to power the boat off the trailer using the outboard or stern drive. Just make sure there's enough water for prop clearance and that the intakes are submerged. Apply power slowly and smoothly and just enough to get the boat moving off the trailer. Once the boat is afloat, tie it to the dock, park the trailer and let the next person have access to the ramp.

Retrieving your boat. At the end of the day, retrieving your boat is pretty much the reverse process of launching. There are a few precautions to keep in mind. As a courtesy to other boaters, don't tie up the ramp while retrieving your vehicle and trailer. Tie your boat to a dock or circle around the lake until the trailer has been positioned on the ramp.

When running the boat onto the trailer, concentrate on keeping the boat centered. Most trailers are designed to keep the boat centered. A little power will be needed to get the boat as close as possible to the winch stand. Don't over-power your boat when loading. It can cause erosion at the end of the ramp resulting in a sharp drop.

Once the boat is within a few inches of the winch stand, snap the winch strap to the bow eye and take up any slack. Tilt your outboard or stern drive all the way up and be sure the winch mechanism is on the "On" position before pulling up the ramp. Otherwise you might be surprised to find your trailer at the top of the ramp while your boat is at the bottom.

Once you've cleared the ramp, pull out of the way to transfer gear, secure tie-downs, pull the drain plugs and other chores. Before hitting the road, hook up your lights and safety chains, make one last inspection for loose gear in the boat, and you're safely on your way. With a little practice launching and retrieving your boat will take only minutes and your efficiency and speed will impress everyone else waiting in line.

For more information, visit www.shorelandr.com, or contact Midwest Industries, 102 E. State Hwy 175, Ida Grove, IA 51445, Phone: 800-859-3028, Fax: 712-364-3361.