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Buying a used boat? Check out the trailer before you buy

If you're in the market to buy a boat, chances are that you'll buy a used boat instead of a new model, according to a recent survey by the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA). Almost 60 percent of those responding to the survey indicated that they bought their current boat used.

The good news is that there are plenty of bargains available for anyone interested in a used boat. However, the challenge to prospective buyers is making sure the boat, motor and trailer package they're buying is a sound investment.

Because the boat and motor represent the biggest part of any purchase, they receive the greatest amount of time and diligence in the inspection and appraisal process. And well they should, but oftentimes the trailer the boat is resting on receives just a cursory glance prior to the sale.

The experts at Midwest Industries, manufacturer of ShoreLand'r boat trailers, say that if the boat and trailer are not properly matched, trailering a boat to and from the water, launching and retrieving can be the most stressful part of boating.

"With the right trailer under your boat, you'll never know it's behind you as you tow it to the lake," says Lonnie Bennigsdorf, sales and technical specialist at Midwest. "However, if the trailer isn't properly set up and adjusted, you'll notice problems right away."

For example, too little tongue weight can cause excessive swaying while towing. Also, if

the bunks or rollers aren't properly adjusted, launching and retrieving can be difficult even under the best of conditions. And worse, if the boat's hull isn't adequately supported, the trailer can actually damage the boat.

So how do you know that the trailer is right for the used boat you're buying? ShoreLand'r has some tips for inspecting a used boat trailer that should help you avoid any major problems.

First, check to see if the trailer is NMMA-certified. There are industry guidelines that make sure a trailer has been built with safety, quality and structural integrity. Also, check the weight limit the trailer can safely handle. Compare this number with the listed weight of the boat and motor. Exceeding the trailer capacity is not only dangerous, it's illegal.

Next, inspect the trailer carefully. Things to look for are rust or corrosion, cracks in the frame or evidence of major frame damage or repair. Also inspect the leaf springs for cracked or broken leaves. Check the for excessive or uneven tread wear on the tires. If less than a quarter-inch of tread remains, you'll need to replace them. Also, if the trailer has bearing protectors, see if the grease reservoir is full. If so, the spring-loaded piston will be approximately 1/8-inch from its seated position.

Trailers either have bunks and rollers, and they seldom need replacement, but a quick inspection will show if there are any problems. Is the boat level on the trailer? If not, take a close look to make sure the bunks and roller are properly adjusted. Is the hull well supported from front to back?

Hook up the trailer to your truck or car and make sure all the lights are working—brakes, running lights and turn signals. Burned out bulbs are easy to fix, but rewiring a trailer can be a chore. Also, check out the winch and straps for frayed edges. It may need to be replaced.

After your inspection of the trailer, if you have any concerns, you should take the boat to

a dealer and have him check out any problems you might have noticed. Most dealers will be happy to give you a second opinion and can also cure any trailering problems you might incur. Axles can be adjusted for better tongue weight and bunks and rollers can be positioned for easier launching and retrieving. You may decide that you want to upgrade to a better trailer, and your local dealer can help you select the right trailer for your "new" used boat.

There are a lot of great bargains and investments in the used boat market. Just remember that a good trailer will go a long way toward protecting your investment. 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.