



CHOOSING THE RIGHT BOAT

In a state with over 12 bodies of water and the largest man-made lake in the Southeast, South Carolina is famous for its year-round water sports. Stand-up paddle boarding, tubing, water skiing, fishing, boating – there are literally dozens of ways to enjoy your time on the lake. Luckily for those of us in this area, we have Lake Murray on our side. Boating is arguably the most communal of all South Carolina water sports activities with over 200 boat ramps state-wide. One of the hardest decisions to make when it comes to purchasing a boat is simply figuring out which one you should buy or even where to begin. We are going to discuss some of the major factors to consider when picking out your perfect boat.

by Derek J. Savoy

Fishing boats, both off-shore and fresh water; sport boats for skiing and tubing; pontoon boats that fit a great amount of people and can maintain a steady cruising pace; deck boats, runabouts, and bow riders to accommodate your crew both in

the front (bow) and back (stern) of the boat – these are just a few of the primary boat styles you'll see on the market today, with all kinds of combinations and variations in the mix. The best way to begin simplifying your search is by asking yourself this: How do you plan on using your boat? This will help you determine which style best suits you.

Once you have chosen which style of boat you're going to be cruising around in this season, there are plenty more variables to consider to ensure you will be more than satisfied with this long-term purchase. Size of the boat, performance and speed of the engine, whether the engine is inboard or outboard (if there is an option), and, of course, the preferred price range are all additional factors to consider prior to getting into details such

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as color and seating arrangement. Many boat dealers will have only one or two varied brands of engine that their boats come equipped with. This may be a decision made by the dealership or by the boat manufacturer itself. For example, Yamaha boats are equipped with Yamaha engines exclusively, whereas Harris Pontoons can be equipped with Mercury or Honda outboard motors depending on what dealer you're working with. So, if you have a preference on engine manufacturer, be sure to check with your local dealer and make sure the boat you're considering can be equipped with your preferred engine.

When considering style and engine size for your boat, you also want to think about where you'll be using it the most. Your environment is going to weigh heavily on what size boat you're going to need

to adequately maneuver the water. Some smaller, private lakes have a maximum vessel size/engine size they will allow their residents to own and use on that lake. Other lakes, such as Lake Murray, are highly trafficked and have so much open space that you might find yourself being pushed around by the wake of other boats if you're driving anything less than 16 feet in length, depending on the style. This is another significant factor of a boat purchase that consumers often overlook – in this situation, size matters.

Now that we have decided on style, engine type and size of the boat, it is time to pick a manufacturer. There are literally dozens of distinct brands, each with their own set of patented highlights that make it borderline impossible for a consumer to compare them all side-by-side. It helps in this stage of shopping to set a firm budget and to know which brands will fall within this price range. This is best done by going to local dealerships and/or visiting their websites to see what prices in their inventory look like compared with what you're looking to spend. There are over 10 different boat dealers in Lexington

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County alone, and they all carry varied brands of boats, so this can be done on a relatively local level. Once you locate which dealers stock a product that meets the criteria you have set thus far, it's time to start paying these dealers a visit.

The best way to compare these types of products is to see them in person. You'll want to get in the boat to get a feel for how much space you'll have, feel how comfortable the seats are throughout, experience what type of amenities the boat includes such as location of radio controls for ease of use, how much shade the Bimini top/tower provides, sound-system quality, floorplan options, and whatever other details are important to you and your family. Most dealerships have weekend hours, so that is a great opportunity to take the family out to see firsthand what really catches your attention.

Of course, another option to consider when shopping for your perfect boat is whether to buy new or pre-owned. When shopping pre-owned, all the previous factors you've been considering are still top priority. Just because you aren't buying brand-new off the lot does not mean you have to give up size, style, and performance. There are plenty of certified pre-owned dealers out there, just like in the auto industry. Keep in mind, however, when shopping for pre-owned boats that an older boat with low hours is typically a red flag. Boats need to be taken out and used regularly to maintain good condition, so a 10-year-old boat with only 100 hours is a valid reason to question the condition of the motor. The average boater will put approximately 50–100 hours per year on an engine, and the maintenance schedule varies among manufacturers. Using these numbers as a guide, this is just something to keep in mind, but it is always a good idea to consult with a certified professional to get his or her opinion regarding a particular boat and its quality.

As another beautiful season on Lake Murray is right around the corner, best of luck in searching for your new boat. Use these tips as a guide for figuring out where to begin and do as much research as possible before meeting with a dealer. It's never too late to buy your dream boat. We look forward to seeing you out on the water this season. ■

Happy boating!

