

Tips for selling your boat

By Wayne Canning, SA

OK you've decided its time to sell your boat now what? Hang a sign up and hope for the best? Hire a broker? Place an add in the local paper? You have many choices but the first should be to get the boat in prime selling condition.

The longer it takes to sell you're boat the more you are going to spend trying to sell her and keeping her in tiptop condition. You also want to get the best price possible; you don't want a lot of little problems to drive the price down just as you are closing the sale.

As a marine surveyor specializing in pre-purchase surveys of pleasure craft I have seem many deals go south for reasons that easily could have been avoided. There is nothing worse than having a buyer with check in hand back out because of a small problem that looked big or several small problems making the boat appear to be a lemon. This is why I am taking time to put together this seller's guild to help you avoid the deal killers and get the best price possible for you boat.

In the old days a buyer looking for a boat would visit all the local yards within diving distance. This limited what was available and left little for comparison. Today's buyer is just as likely to start their search on the internet. They will look at many boats to compare prices, condition, and equipment carefully. They will be much more informed and educated about a particular boat than ever. This is why you the seller must be equally prepared when presenting your boat for inspection.

You've seen the reality TV shows about how to "flip" a house for profit. Many of the tricks the sellers use on these shows are similar for boats. The primary difference between a house and a boat is location. You know the old real estate saying "location, location, location." Unless you're selling a slip with your boat location is not a big factor. Looks, looks, looks, are what is most important with a boat. The very first boat I ever bought I bought mainly because I fell in love with her at first sight. When I sold that boat the buyer said he too had fallen in love with her at first sight.

The following is a list of things that will help your buyer fall in love with your boat and pay the price you want.

1. First impressions.

Looks are important so make the most of them. Before hanging up that "For Sale" sign make sure your boat is clean and shiny. Have the topsides and deck compounded and waxed to bring out the shine. Polish the metal and add a fresh coat of varnish or oil to any woodwork, touch up any paint that needs it. Replace any worn carpet or sun faded curtains. Remove or replace any worn or old canvas. Your better off not having faded and worn canvas on at all then to have it make your boat look old and worn. Replace old frayed dock lines and fenders, this will give the impression the boat is well carded for. Remove personal photos, you want the buyer to think of this as his boat not yours. You can leave a couple of small photos of your happy family using the boat to show the fun you have had, and give the buyer a positive image. Remove those cute plaques with the funny sayings, they are a distraction and a buyer may not find them as funny as you do. Clean out the frig and food lockers. Put baking soda in the food lockers and frig to remove any odors. Don't forget to clean out the ice maker an bait freezer if

you have them. Set the table as if you're getting ready for an elegant dinner. Make the boat look attractive and ready to use but not cluttered.

2. Archaeology or Digging deeper.

Clean out all the lockers, remove all personal belongings. Lockers always look bigger when empty, but look small when filled. You want the buyer to think there is a lot of storage for all his stuff. Leave just what you are selling with the boat and what is needed for normal operation. Trust me the new buyer is not interested in that 300' spool of 3/4" hemp you have as a spare anchor rode. It is by far better to present a neat orderly boat than one with a lot of extra "stuff." If you are still using the boat keep the personal belongings to a minimum. Now that the lockers are cleaned out giving them a good coat of fresh white paint will make them look even bigger. Make sure the engine compartment is clean and orderly. Touch up the paint on the engines and clean any oil or grime. Place new oil sorbs under the engines. Clean and paint the bilges. Secure any loose or hanging wires and hoses. As mentioned above clean out all of the galley lockers, refrigerators, and freezers. Clean the stove and remove any extra appliances like blenders and toaster ovens. These items add little to the value of the boat and make the galley look smaller and cluttered. Clean out the head compartments. This is one area you really want to shine. If the buyer's wife walks into a smelly nasty head the sale may be over. Remove the soggy rolls of TP from the back corners of the lockers; clean all traces of mold and dirt. Make sure it does not look or smell like the inside of a gas station bathroom of I-95.

3. What's that smell?

No kidding I have known people who have sold their boats because their wives said it smelled funny. The one thing you do not want is for the prospective buyer to ask what's that smell when they enter the boat. If your boat has any funk going on you need to find the source and get rid of it. Keep the holding tank cleaned out and add deodorant. If your head uses salt water for flushing shut off the intake and flush several times with fresh water. Make sure the bilge is clean and fresh, flush out the shower sump and add one of those non-colored toilet bowl cleaner tablets to your bilge. A general dosing with Febreze may help. Air the boat out often, and make sure it's dry inside. Fix any deck leaks that may be allowing water in. Once again empty lockers do not smell but ones filled with wet rope do! Place dryer sheets in lockers and clean up any mildew or mold.

4. It worked last summer.

You're cleaned up looking and smelling good the buyer is impressed, time for the sea trial you turn the key and nothing. Well it ran last summer. You may have just lost the sale. As a surveyor it never ceases to surprise me how often things do not work. Dead batteries, stuck solenoids, clogged fuel filters, these all can cause a buyer to walk. Before the buyer arrives turn everything on and make sure it works as it's supposed to. Go down to the boat once a week or so and start the engines, run pumps, turn on lights, make a list of things that do not work and get them fixed. Check the batteries and make sure they hold a charge. Check all engine fluids. Fill the water tank. Turn on all the lights, blow the horn, and turn on that blender you've never used. Pretend you're a buyer yourself and test everything. Boats are complicated systems and it takes time to test every

part but you know a buyer is going to hire me or one of my colleagues to do just that. And you can be sure he will have a list of what does not work when its time to sign the contract. Have the boat fueled and ready for a sea trial on a short notice. Fill the water tank and check for leaks. Make sure the hot water heater works. If you have raw water wash down and or a bait tank, make sure all these systems are working and not leaking. Make sure all the engine gauges and tank level meters work. If you run out of fuel on a sea trial because the gauge wasn't working you could loose the sale. Clean out sea strainers, and air filters. Change oil and fuel filters. Check the wipers. Make sure all the doors and drawers operate freely. Replace old hoses and hose clamps.. If you are selling your boat with a trailer make sure it is in good operating condition and that all the lights work. Many buyers these days locate boats on the internet and want to take them home with them after looking at the boat. If you have a road worthy trailer you can expand the area for potential buyers by hundreds of miles. If your boat is a sailboat make sure all the rigging and hardware operates smoothly, a little Silicone sprayed in the tracks and blocks can make a world of difference in how this equipment operates. You get the idea, the more stuff you have working well the better your odds are that you will make the sale.

5. Bottoms up.

If your boat lives in the water make sure she has been hauled for a basic bottom job. Clean and paint, new zincs, check the running gear make sure the props are in good condition and check the bearings. A boat with a clean freshly painted bottom will perform better giving better speeds and performance on a sea trial this especially true for sail boats and high performance power boats. Many buyers have a set minimum speed requirement and 1 or 2 knots on the top end can make or break a sale.

6. Presale survey.

What! Isn't the buyer supposed to pay for a survey? Why should I have to pay for that? I know you think because I'm a surveyor I'm trying to sell extra services. Sure I want more business but I also have seen many deals go bad because of a bad survey report. There's nothing worse than having a buyer with check in hand walk away still holding that check because of a bad survey. Or maybe the report comes back but now the buyer wants to "adjust" the price. Having a survey done before you sell the boat will give you an edge. You will have a chance to fix problems before the buyer ever knows they were there. Fixing it yourself can save money. Also if you know what's wrong you can get estimates for repairs and know in advance what it will cost. If on the other hand the buyer gets the estimates he's going to use the highest one to re-negotiate the price. A good surveyor can also give you suggestions for improving the appearance of the boat and you can show you already corrected any deficiencies. If there are any hidden defects that could turn out to be deal killers at least you will be aware of them in advance. A buyer who knows you have a recent survey will feel more comfortable about the boat and may not even have the boat surveyed prior to purchasing.

I know the list above is a lot to accomplish. The idea is to get you thinking about the things that will help you with the sale. Start with the small items that fit your boat and are easy to do. Work on the things that will make the boat look good. It costs little to clean

up and remove excess equipment. Keep working to improve the salability of your even after you have listed her or placed your ads. I have seen many sellers put the boat up for sale then walk away thinking they are done. This is not the case, a boat does not do well just sitting unused. Go down and start the engines every week or so, run pumps and wash the deck. While your doing that take some more junk off the boat air her out, scrub the decks. If you have listed with a broker do not count on them to do these things, their job is to sell boats not maintain them. If you cannot attend to your boat because you are out of the area hire someone to do it for you. This way you boat will always look good for a prospective buyer who is just walking down the dock. Remember love at first sight can often sell a boat. Remember a little time and money spent before the sale will mean more money in your pocket after the sale.