



It's important to take copious notes

Boat-Test Checklist

A professional boat test involves more than just an afternoon daysail. Using SAIL's boat-test checklist could help make you a much more informed shopper

BY BILL SPRINGER

» FRIENDS SHOW ME NO PITY when I tell them I'm off to test another boat, but in reality, boat testing can be hard work. Digging into a bilge, poking behind cabinets, under floorboards, and into the engine compartment to find a boat's good (and potentially bad) points requires skill, knowledge, and experience. Just as important is attention to detail and a willingness to roll up your sleeves and look for what the dealers and the brochures may not tell you. Of course, a boat test should give a potential buyer an idea of

the boat's most important characteristics—how it performs under sail in certain weather conditions—but you're cheating yourself of vital information if you gloss over the less glamorous aspects of a test. If you really want to see what makes a prospective boat tick (and clear evidence of what you're paying for), use this checklist on your next test. It is condensed from the 28-page checklist we use on our boat tests. Take copious notes on everything you find, and start your evaluation before the sails go up. ▲

DOCKSIDE INSPECTION

HULL AND DECK

- ☐ What hull, deck, core material (where applicable), and resin/epoxy have been used to construct the boat? Have the manufacturer's rep provide a detailed description of the boat's construction, including the hull-to-deck joint, and then inspect each area of boat for yourself.
- ☐ Is the construction sufficiently strong and durable?
- ☐ Does the hull have a blister warranty?

RIG

- ☐ Is the rig sufficiently strong and durable?
- ☐ If the mast is keel-stepped, is the mast boot properly sealed?
- ☐ Are the turnbuckles on the standing rigging properly toggled?
- ☐ Are the chainplates properly aligned with their stays?
- ☐ Are the leads for the furling line from the drum to the cockpit fair?
- ☐ Does the mainsail reefing/furling system work properly?
- ☐ Is the boom height appropriate?
- ☐ Are the offwind, reaching, and spinaker/whisker pole arrangements satisfactory?

COCKPIT

- ☐ Are the mainsheet traveler and mainsheet out of the way of crew working in the cockpit?
- ☐ Is the companionway sill set well above the cockpit sole?
- ☐ Does the cockpit have adequate drainage?
- ☐ Are the cockpit seats long enough and wide enough to sleep on?

» CRUISING TIPS

- ☐ Are there foot braces in the cockpit for sailing when heeled?
- ☐ Is there adequate room to move around the tiller or wheel?
- ☐ Is the helm position comfortable while under way?
- ☐ Is there good visibility from the helm when standing or sitting at the helm?
- ☐ Are the engine controls readily accessible from the wheel?
- ☐ Is the engine panel clearly visible and set above likely flooding levels?
- ☐ Are the fuel-tank vents well clear of possible flooding levels?
- ☐ Is there a manual bilgepump accessible from the helm?
- ☐ If the boat has wheel steering, is the emergency steering accessible and is it easy to install and operate?
- ☐ Are the primary winches and the mainsheet readily accessible from the helm for shorthanded sailing?
- ☐ Do all sheets and control lines have fairleads?

- ☐ Is there adequate cockpit stowage for lines, winch handles, and miscellaneous gear?
- ☐ Are the cockpit-locker lids sturdy and well gasketed?
- ☐ Is there standing headroom under the dodger or bimini (where applicable)?
- ☐ Is there adequate ondeck stowage?
- ☐ Is the propane locker properly sealed and vented? Is there a ventilated area to store gasoline for outboards?
- ☐ Is there stowage space for an inflatable or a liferaft?

DECK LAYOUT

- ☐ Can the sails be handled efficiently? Are there properly sized and well-located winches, rope clutches, a mainsheet traveler, furling controls, etc.?
- ☐ Are there adequate grabrails, and do they go all the way forward?
- ☐ Is the antiskid effective and well-placed?
- ☐ Are the stanchions strongly mounted?
- ☐ Is lifeline height appropriate for the boat's use? Is it easy to access the cockpit from a dinghy?

GROUND TACKLE

- ☐ Do the cleats have backing plates and are they sufficiently strong?
- ☐ Is there a fairlead to the bow roller(s)?
- ☐ Are there midships cleats?
- ☐ Is there a sufficient anchor locker?
- ☐ Does the windlass work properly?
- ☐ Will a chain rode stow itself as it comes aboard?

OVERALL SAILING PERFORMANCE

- ☐ Record apparent-wind speeds, sea states, and sails flown during your test.
- ☐ What was the lowest upwind apparent-wind angle?
- ☐ What are the tacking angles according to the compass?
- ☐ What is the maximum boatspeed on each point of sail?
- ☐ Evaluate the feel of the helm. Is it well balanced? Is the steering smooth? Is it stiff?
- ☐ Is there excessive weather or lee helm?
- ☐ Does the boat turn quickly or slowly?
- ☐ How effective are the sailhandling systems and cockpit layout?
- ☐ What is the motion like?
- ☐ How does the boat point? Is it easy to find and stay in the groove?
- ☐ How easy or hard is it to singlehand or sail the boat shorthanded?
- ☐ How easy is it to set and sail the downwind sails?
- ☐ Once you've spent sufficient time sailing on all points of sail, take the time to make detailed notes of your overall impression of the boat's sailing performance.



Don't be shy about investigating hard to reach spots

PERFORMANCE UNDER POWER

- ☐ Test and record boatspeed at cruising rpm and at full throttle.
- ☐ How quickly does the boat turn 360 degrees?
- ☐ What are the sound levels in the saloon at battery charging rpm and crusing rpm?
- ☐ How does the boat handle in forward and reverse? How easy is it to use the engine controls and gauges? How effective is the engine-noise and vibration insulation?
- ☐ Write a synopsis of your overall impression of handling under sail and power.

BELOWDECK LAYOUT

SALOON

- ☐ Is there any antiskid on the cabin sole? Are the treads and handrails on the companionway ladder safe?
- ☐ Is there a wet locker or space to hang foulies in a head near the companionway?
- ☐ Is there adequate headroom?
- ☐ Are the settees comfortable? Are they long enough and wide enough to sleep on?
- ☐ How many people can the saloon accommodate for drinks, dinner, and overnight and long-term cruising?
- ☐ If the settee table doubles as a berth, is it sturdy as well as easy to set up?
- ☐ How many seaberths are there in the saloon?
- ☐ Is the lighting adequate?
- ☐ Is the quantity and quality of storage in the saloon appropriate for the boat's stated purpose?
- ☐ Are the cabinet doors and locker latches secure and easy to work?

- ☐ Are there enough handholds and brace points in the saloon?
- ☐ How is the fit and finish of the joinery and fiberglass in the saloon?
- ☐ Do the opening hatches and ports provide good visibility and ventilation?

NAV STATION

- ☐ Closely examine the nav station's chart table (size, fiddles, etc.), the electronics installation, and stowage for cruising guides, charts, and nav tools.
- ☐ Is there good lighting for the navigator?
- ☐ Is the seat comfortable when the boat is heeled in both directions?

CABINS

- ☐ Are the berths big enough and easy to get into?
- ☐ Is there adequate lighting (including for reading in bed)?
- ☐ Is there adequate storage (hanging lockers and cabinets)?
- ☐ Do any cabins have ensuite heads?
- ☐ Make sure cabins have adequate headroom, changing room, and ventilation.
- ☐ If there is an aft cabin, is it possible to exit the cabin without going through the galley in the event of a galley fire?

GALLEY

- ☐ Does the propane installation meet ABYC standards?
- ☐ Is the stove gimballed well enough to stay level at a 30-degree heel angle on either tack?
- ☐ Are there sufficient bracing surfaces (including a crash bar) to free up both hands when using the stove?

- ☐ Is there a hatch or vent over the stove?

- ☐ Is there enough galley storage and counter space?

- ☐ Do the counters have adequate fiddles?

Are the galley sinks adequate size?

- ☐ Will the sinks backflood on one or the other tack?

- ☐ Are the galley seacocks good quality and readily accessible?

- ☐ Is there a backup manual water pump in the galley?

- ☐ Is there an effective trash-can arrangement?

HEAD(S)

- ☐ Is the toilet easy to operate?
- ☐ Will the shower drain at sea? If not, will water remain in the shower pan when the boat is heeled?
- ☐ Will the sink backflood on one or the other tack?
- ☐ Is there a siphon break on the toilet discharge line?
- ☐ Is the toilet plumbed with sanitation hose?
- ☐ What is the holding-tank material and capacity?
- ☐ Does the holding tank have a level indicator?
- ☐ Is there a mechanism for emptying the holding tank at sea?

SYSTEMS

DC SYSTEM

- ☐ What is the system voltage and battery capacity? Is there a separate house bank and starting battery?

» CRUISING TIPS

Make sure you know exactly what you are buying



- ☐ Are the batteries secured in a vented battery box or compartment?
- ☐ If wet-cell batteries are installed, are they readily accessible for service? Is the DC-to-AC inverter correctly sized?
- ☐ Is the inverter easy to turn off?
- ☐ Is the DC side overcurrent-protected?
- ☐ Does the DC panel have a voltmeter?
- ☐ Does the DC panel have a systems monitor?
- ☐ Is there a 12-volt outlet?
- ☐ Are there adequate circuit breakers?
- ☐ Are there separate breakers and switches for the windlass and inverter?
- ☐ Do the cables meet ABYC standards?

- ☐ Are all wiring terminals labeled?
- ☐ Is there a comprehensive wiring diagram?

AC SYSTEM

- ☐ Are all the AC circuits also powered by the inverter?
- ☐ Is the whole boat GFCI-protected?
- ☐ Are there adequate GFCI outlets in the head and galley?
- ☐ Are all AC connections made inside protected enclosures that require tools for access?

REFRIGERATION

- ☐ Evaluate fridge and freezer access as well as the quality and thickness of ice-box insulation.

- ☐ Confirm that the compressor is big enough to keep the units cold with normal use and that the units are adequately ventilated and segregated from heat sources.

GENERAL PLUMBING

- ☐ Are all through-hulls UL-listed and properly installed?
- ☐ Are all through-hulls readily accessible (even with gear stowed)?
- ☐ Is there adequate fuel and fresh-water tankage for the boat's intended use?
- ☐ What are the tanks made of? Will they be easy to replace if necessary?

ENGINE & PROPELLER

- ☐ Take note of the engine make and type, its horsepower rating, and the alternator capacity.
- ☐ Is there a shaft or saildrive?
- ☐ Is access to the engine (and genset, if applicable) adequate for changing fuel filters, the water-pump impeller, oil and oil filters, transmission fluid, and for shaft-seal maintenance?

BILGEPUMPS

- ☐ Is there a central sump to which all compartments drain, even when the boat is well heeled?
- ☐ If not, can spaces where water will accumulate be pumped out?
- ☐ Are the keelbolts accessible and of the proper size and material?
- ☐ Is the wiring for the electric bilge pump and float switch fully protected from moisture and corrosion?
- ☐ Is this circuit properly overcurrent-protected?
- ☐ Is there a backup high-water alarm?