

Over 47 Years in Business

'Ask Dr Gel' • 20 Years in Boating on the Hudson

Ask Dr. Gel

by Dave Weakley



Dave Weakley is the owner of American Boat Restoration and has been keeping boaters afloat in fine trim and good repair for over 47 years.

"Email me or call me with your questions! I'll be happy to help you out"
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I am thinking about buying a small Pre-Owned Boat. What should I be aware of?

It's all about structure! The structure of the boat is as important as the foundation under your house.

Before you make a purchase here's some food for thought...

To check the structural integrity of the boat, begin at the stern, port or starboard side. Look across the outside of the transom. There should not be any indents in the area where the outdrive or engine is fastened to the boat on IO's and outboard's. Indents indicate the transom core may be soft. Next, check the transom for soundness. Using the handle end of a screwdriver, tap all over the outside of the transom. Tap lightly preventing any damage. Don't use a hammer! You are listening for tightness; a solid tap noise will indicate a rigid core a thud noise represents softness and/or delaminating is present. Professionals often use a moisture meter, but tapping is a good indication of condition. Transom replacements are expensive. A solid transom is a must! Standing at the transom, look under the boat; check the hull - does the keel run in a straight line from the stern to the bow? Go to the bow - does the hull run true to the stern? Look all along the bottom. Is there evidence of previous repairs, blisters, cracks, or the boat being beached? Is the gel coat worn off showing the fiberglass mat? Are there signs of impact damage?

The Rituals of Spring as a Boat Owner

Continued from the April/May 2023 issue.

Now look down each side of the boat. Check for any irregularities under the rub rail. Make sure there is a good seal all away around the boat. A boat is built in two halves and joined behind the rub rail with screws and/or rivets. Again, can you see any evidence of previous repairs and/or cracks? Areas most often showing cracks are along the chine (where the side of the boat meets the bottom) and the strikes (the hull body lines). The strakes provide two purposes - the way the boat tracks, and they give strength to the hull. Make sure they are all in good shape.

Get in the boat. Look in the engine compartment; check the transom on the inside using the tapping method test as performed on the outside. Take a wrench and try to tighten the engine mount bolts that fasten the engine to the stringers. On outboards try tightening the bottom two mounting bolts inside the transom. If the bolts are tight, it is a good indication the stringers are in good shape. If the bolts are loose and all they do is spin, this means the stringers are soft and the only thing holding the engine in place is gravity. Pick up your wrench and look at another boat! If all is in good condition, check where the floor meets the transom. Is it solid? Work your way forward checking for firm flooring - no sponginess! Look inside the storage compartments and, if applicable, the ski locker(s). Is there dampness or water? Looking along the compartment sides, is moisture present? If it is a bow rider with a walk-thru, open and close the windshield. Be sure the windshield lines up and locks easily. If not, it could be out of adjustment, or worse - the floor could be soft, allowing for the dash to sag. Check seat cushions - what kind of condition are they in? Are they well cared for? Or are they mildewed and so heavy your kids can't pick them up? Look under the cushions for dampness, musty smell, rotted wood and missing screws. Is the seating firmly attached, are the screws tight?

Check the cockpit gunnels, look closely in the corners. Is the gelcoat cracked? Widespread cracks could be a sign of structural failure.

Make sure all hardware is firmly attached including bow eyes, cleats, handrails and bow rails. What condition is the gelcoat in around these areas?

Keep in mind the age of the boat. Is the company still in business? Give them a call! What kind and how much refurbishing does it need? Some boat builders offer parts for only 3-5 years from the manufacturer date. If rub rails, seating, striping, decals, etc. cannot be acquired, after market parts are obtained for repairs.

It is always best to consult other qualified marine repairers.

We recommend a water test and also a mechanical assessment by a certified marine tech to check engine compression, steering & shift cables, shaft, rudder, electronics, wiring, hoses, fuel lines, bilge pump, blower, lights, etc.! You may want to consider having the boat surveyed by an accredited marine surveyor who can thoroughly examine the boat.

Be particular in your quest to buy a pre-owned boat; most importantly, make sure the boat is strong and solid for you and your family to enjoy in the years to come!

Learn All Aspects of Minor Gelcoat Repairs.

American Boat Restoration

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"Your knowledge and the quality of the materials you use will lead to successful repairs!"

Instructor - Dave Weakley,
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