

Our New Boat

by Capt. John Thompson

The long anticipated day for the delivery of our new boat finally arrived on a very spring-like day this past May. Like most, if not all boaters, taking delivery of a new boat is a very, very special day, comparable to a first kiss, taking your parents' car alone for the first time, your first (legal) beer and maybe even that day when you said yes to a long-term commitment with your first mate.

The arrival of our new boat was just such a special day. Delivery day was preceded, however, by nearly one and a half years of in-depth research, attendance at numerous boat shows, reading virtually every boating publication, and weighing all the pros and cons so that I was a well prepared and knowledgeable boat buyer.

Looking back to the winter of '04-05, and more specifically the Hartford Boat Show at the Civic Center, before it moved to the new Convention Center, it was there, amid all the shiny new boats, accessories and assorted toys, that I finally was able to convince my first mate that a new boat did indeed fit into our future. Maybe it was a combination of the cold gray and snow-filled skies over Hartford, the smell of fiberglass and boat wax inside the Civic Center or the smooth and persistent talk of Captain "Wanna-be" and his promise of calm seas, sunny skies, interesting ports-of-call and, of course, quality time together that ultimately clinched the decision.

Over a pre-decision meal and several adult beverages at "Coaches", we, mostly I, talked about seeing all the sights of Long Island Sound, the Connecticut River and more distant ports such as Greenport, Mystic and maybe Block Island. We talked about the hours of togetherness and the opportunity to share our boat with our family and friends. We also discussed the financial implications of owning a boat, dismissing the rumors that it was a matter of deciding just how much debt we wanted to incur.

Selecting a new boat....such a wonderful opportunity!! What did we want to do with our new boat: cruise, fish, over-night, water sports, simple relaxation or even use it as a floating summer cottage? Like many boaters, I suspect that I didn't want to be limited to a single activity, so flexibility in the boat we chose was a must.

Unlike today when gas prices are floating on the high side of \$4.00 per gallon, gas in the winter of '04-05 was still a "reasonable" \$2.00 per gallon, and the overall

cost of owning and operating a boat was not the biggest issue when selecting a new boat. More salient issues included gas or diesel; inboard, outboard or stern drive; 2 or 4 stroke, fresh or raw water cooled; and express or convertible.

Of course, I had to consider the passenger capacity of the boat, the number and location of the berths, the size of the head, amenities in the galley, protection from the weather, speed, range, noise levels, fuel capacity, LOA and beam, and without question the appearance. What captain doesn't want his new boat to shine, sparkle and

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convey a sense of sea-worthiness and pride of ownership? Our new boat would, of course, be capable of satisfying fully all those objectives. As with most, if not all, new boat buyers, our vision of cruises to new ports-of-call, restful anchorages, freedom to cruise when and where we wanted was shattered when we began to assess honestly the true cost of boat ownership. Sadly, as our process of evaluation evolved, it became painfully clear that while the boats inside the covers of boating magazines were exactly what we wanted, they exceeded our financial reach.

Not to worry, surely there were many boats that were within our financial capabilities while still providing many of the features that we had decided we needed on our new boat. My search continued. I talked so frequently with the sales people at Sea Ray, Maxum, Bayliner, Larson and Four Winds that we got to know each other on a first name basis and even began to ask about our first mates and crew. I also searched the Internet for up-to-date test reports and ratings. While I

didn't plan to sell our new boat, which we hadn't even purchased yet, I also did extensive research on which boats held their value over the long term, thus minimizing future depreciation and enhancing our ability to trade up. When visiting other boaters, I was untactful in asking about their feelings about their boats, what they liked and disliked, and most importantly, if they would buy the same boat again. Needless to say, their opinions ranged from "Best boat I've ever owned" to "I'd sink the tub if I thought I could get away with it" and generally everything in-between.

The dark storm clouds of confusion and uncertainty hung over me during the 18 months of searching for our new boat. Several times during this process, I thought I had found our "perfect" boat and was ready to close the deal until something happened that added that boat to our list of non-contenders. With the '06 boating season quickly approaching, it was now time to act.

In early April we met with our selected dealer and worked out all the final details, including delivery price, financing, insurance, registration and most importantly, delivery date. With the ink still wet on the contract, my soon-to-be first mate and I celebrated with a waterfront lunch at Bill's. The clam chowder, fried clams and shrimp seemed to taste even better, knowing that in a mere four weeks we'd be on the water, in our new boat.

Delivery day finally arrived. We couldn't have been happier if we were on the way to the hospital to pick up our first born. The salesman met us at the door and again congratulated us on our selection. After signing yet more papers, he took us out the back and we caught the first sight of our new boat. As promised, he had the boat in the water and ready for us. It was everything that we had hoped for. It was just sitting there waiting for us to board and start up. The salesman went through the usual product orientation discussion and then it was our turn.

We climbed aboard and I, for the first time, pulled the cord, bringing to life our 4 horsepower motor, which was mounted securely to the 8'6" inflatable. My first mate, in her docksiders, shorts and nautical tee shirt, carefully climbed on board, and after casting off the dock lines, we pushed away and powered off at 5 mph in the No Wake Zone for our first cruise and our future on the water, in.....our new boat.

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