



# Check out what 2003 has in store for boating innovations

With endless miles of Michigan shoreline — more, in fact, than any other state in the nation — it's easy to see why boating is one of the favorite recreation activities of residents and visitors alike. Plus, new innovations are making boating easier and more fun than ever.

"There are an abundance of opportunities to stay in the state and have a great time, and boating can play a huge role," said Brad Huffman, general manager, at Grand Bay Marine in Traverse City. "With the economy tightening, boating may become even more popular than it already is. It's easy to hit the water for a day of fun, and, although most people don't realize it, boat payments are actually much lower than car payments."

According to Huffman, people can purchase a well-equipped 18-to 20-foot boat, safety equipment and trailer with no money down for payments of \$200 - \$220 per month.

"Families can build memories every day with boating," added Huffman. "In fact, I guarantee that people will create more memories from boating trips than they'd ever make going to Disney World. Boating is such a bonding activity. It's a great environment to introduce kids into. Families can swim, tube, ski, fish and sightsee together."

Boats span a wide range and, depending on one's interests, some boats are more geared to specific tasks than others.

"Fishing is one of Michigan's largest recreation activities and for those who only plan to fish, specific boats are made just for fishing," said Russ McNamara, owner at Murray's Boats and Motors in Traverse City. "For those who want to fish, ski and

take family and friends out on the water, runabouts or deck boats are great all-around boats."

Boating demographics cover a wide range because product selection is so diverse. People can boat in everything from paddle and rowboats to 42-foot twin diesel boats with \$15,000 entertainment systems. Boating, literally, offers something for everyone.

"The current trend is toward deck boats," said Huffman. "They are the SUV of the boat world because they do so many things. Deck boats have evolved a lot over the years, too. More and more, they're meshing with runabouts, offering deeper sides, full walk through windshields, more interior room and a beam that's carried all the way forward."

Pontoon boats are another trend that offer much more than they have in the past.

"We're seeing a lot more creature comforts added to pontoons," said Jeff Gardner, general manager, at Glen Lake Marine in Empire. "There are wonderful stereo systems, removable seats, tables and ottomans for more space, swivel and sliding seating, burl wood and gold-trimmed gauges. Pontoons have become much, much more than the floating barges with aluminum lawn furniture of the past. Now, they're very luxurious."

Along with trends in types of boats, manufacturers are also prompting trends in overall performance.

"Over the last few years, we've seen boat companies really improving the performance of boats," said McNamara. "In the past, manufacturers took the position that if the boat floated, it was a bonus. Now, they're lis-

tening to customers and offering comfort and speed. The engines are designed to produce greater fuel efficiency and they're clean burning."

In addition to a cleaner burning, more fuel-efficient engine, more and more people are moving from a two-stroke to a four-stroke engine.

"In the past, two-stroke engines required people to prime and choke the engine," said Gardner. "Manufacturers realized that people want to be able to turn a key and have the boat power on like they do in their cars. People want an easy launch and an easy start and four-stroke engines offer that."

More performance, cleaner burning and an easier start: what could be better? Manufacturers have also decreased engine sizes and increased the speed.

"Imagine that the hull of a boat is like the wing on an aircraft," said Huffman. "The more slippery you make it, the less drag it has. Boats are the same way. By improving boat designs through technology, companies were able to create less drag, which ultimately means it takes less horsepower to push the boat through the water. At the same time, less drag also means that boats are faster than ever. For the owner, this means lower fuel and insurance costs."

Time is of the essence for both manufacturers and boating owners.

"There's really an improved manufacturing process today," said Gardner. "Producing a boat used to be very complicated. It had to be hand set and cured in a cold set. Now, everything is computer controlled and, instead of

huge variations in weight differences between boats, today's boats may have a slight variation of 50 pounds. Overall, the process is much cheaper for manufacturers and that savings extends to the customer. Plus, many companies are now offering lifetime warranties on their hulls. That's a huge difference from the past."

In addition to decreased time to actually produce boats, owners want to spend less time maintaining boats.

"That used to be a common complaint among boat owners," said McNamara. "Manufacturers listened and responded with a host of new innovations, including better canvas and gel coats. Instead of having to clean and oil teak, people are able to spend more leisure time relaxing on their boats. People don't want a project; they want quality."

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