



Safety, caution & prevention key while out boating

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tor in boaters being more willing to wear them.

Paul Leman of Long Lake Marina said that in addition to taking boating safety classes, which are required for operators of personal watercraft (safe boating certificates may help qualify one for insurance discounts), he encourages boaters to make sure they know the rules of operation for younger members of the family, and to regularly take inventory of safety equipment, particularly at the beginning and end of each boating year.

Most boating experts encourage carrying a cellular phone or using a marine radio to notify others of problems or for gathering information on changing weather and wave conditions.

Global Positioning System (GPS) units come in handheld or boat-mounted forms, are less expensive each season, and can be lifesavers in bad weather, on long trips,

or night operations.

“Be sure to include flares and fire extinguishers on your equipment list, and make sure that you do some fact-finding before heading out on the boat,” said Leman, adding that knowing about weather conditions and even changes in water depths can have a dramatic impact on a trip. “And I can’t say enough about boating safety classes. No matter how much you think you know, a refresher never hurts.”

To learn about classes, contact local law enforcement marine safety officers, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, 1-800-336-BOAT, or the Michigan Boating Industries Association at (734) 261-0123.

A number of boat dealerships throughout the region also offer free classes, such as Grand Bay Marine in Traverse City, who have an annual seminar, slated for March of this year. For more information on their event, call 943-0333.



The extras: What’s new in accessories, clothing, safety gear, toys and more

Some say that getting the boat is just the tip of the iceberg — underneath is all the “stuff” to use on it and with it.

Every year as the time gets closer to getting the boat out of storage and back into the water, boating enthusiasts look forward to learning about the latest in water sport toys, boat accessories and equipment and even fashions, all of which are designed to heighten the boating experience.

Some of the items are more practical, having to do with safety and operational considerations, and others lean toward the luxurious; some are perennially popular while others reflect the latest trends; some feature up-to-the-minute technological advances and others a shift in presentation or packaging.

This year, new advances in technology wins out in terms of one particular factor influencing boating accessories. Dale Barker, manager of Boater’s World, located near WalMart at Grand Traverse Crossings in Traverse City, said that from equipment to fashions, there are a wide range of boating products that are better made and more

accessible than ever. In many cases, they are also more affordable.

“Every season, there are new, “hot” items that catch your attention, but in 2003, we’re seeing a lot of things that are better made, with more options, and easier to purchase and operate, and that’s all good news for the consumer,” said Barker. “In every aspect of boating, you can find new and improved products, and some of what’s out there is pretty impressive.”

Take boating wear and apparel, for example. Wet suits are a line of specialty boating wear that is seeing more versatility and adaptability. Another trend in the fashion end of boating is to see more shirts, shorts, caps, sweatshirts and jackets bearing the name of popular boat manufacturers.

Many of these items are premiums that come with the purchase of a boat, so their limited availability and exclusivity make them very attractive to boaters, and to make them even more appealing, high-end fabrics like cashmere can transform a polo shirt into something quite special.

A line of swimwear and shirts generating a lot of excitement is from Cootan, which makes sportswear that makes it possible to get a safe, natural tan while wearing new lightweight Microsol fabrics. They let sunlight through like a medium-level sunscreen, but without oils and lotions.

The concept behind the clothes is that you can get a tan as fast as you would with an SPF #6 sunscreen, and never have to risk unprotected exposure to the sun. The shirts rapidly wick moisture through the fabric so you can stay cooler and drier while this happens, and the swimsuits allow moisture to pass through the suit while increasing hydrodynamic performance.

In terms of water toys that boaters may carry along with them, water skis don’t seem to have waned in popularity. Just like their counterparts on snow, wakeboards are running a very close second. Wake boards are the water-based equivalent of those made for snow, and sales are climbing with both younger people and adults, making for about 50 percent of total water toy sales, said Barker.

On the average, wake boards run from \$100-\$350, though one can spend a substantially higher amount to accentuate the experience by investing in a tower system that attaches to the back of the boat that not only carries wakeboards, but has powerful speakers from which to blast music.

Water tubes have come a long way from the inner tubes that were originally pulled along behind boats. Now, they offer considerably more options, such as being able to accommodate up to four riders at a time. They come in different seat positions, like side by side, and front to back. They’re also steerable, even as they are being towed by a boat. One of the newest is a barrel-shaped tube that allows its riders to “roll” on top of the waves.

Rick Allen of Traverse City’s Grand Bay Marine calls items like that the “equivalent of an amusement park behind a boat.”

The materials used for water tubes are also lighter in weight and more durable, meaning more bang for the buck for boaters.

Two of the fastest-growing trends in boating in regards to purchasing accessories

relate to music and safety communication.

More boating supply stores are carrying specialized music systems like Sirius, which has several different programs for putting all-music, news or sports radio channels with no commercial interruption or static interference on boats. Some of them can be purchased with short-term contracts that take into account Michigan’s shorter boating season, and all are designed to be marine-compliant.

As far as other systems for communication, the array of VHF radio options — which are essential to boaters — continue to expand every year, and run the gamut from small, handheld systems to others that are more elaborate and are installed directly into the boat.

VHF radios are of such paramount importance that Boater’s World will hold a free-to-the-public seminar to learn more about them on Tuesday, Feb. 11, at 6:30 p.m. at the store, which is located at 2664 Crossings Circle, across from Grand Traverse Mall. For more information or to make reservations, call 932-1851.