

2024 **BOATING** SPECIAL EDITION

# FRESHWATER BUYERS GUIDE

63

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# FRESHWATER BUYERS GUIDE



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### SEE VIDEOS!

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## FISHING'S A-LURE

Catching fish is just the beginning.

I was quietly motoring out one recent morning, the outboard just ticking over and the creek a-shimmer with bait. The little fish dappled the surface like the unseen drops from an unfelt shower. In the east, the low sun treated my eyes to an orange-and-blue artwork. My nostrils filled with the redolence of water, summer blooms, wet earth and more. I was fully alive and, in a rare moment of nondistractedness, able to both recognize and appreciate that fact. I can claim that experience because I am a fisherman. Fishing is why I was there.

On another recent outing—this time with my daughters—I turned to look at my 16-year-old, who was fishing in the bow. She was holding her rod and the line was in the water, but she was not actually fishing. At least not in the casting and working your lure sense of it. Instead, she was looking into the water, her line slack, and her face wearing a content expression with the hint of a smile. No TikTok, no music blaring, no selfie-taking. Just a young person looking into the depths and alone with her thoughts.

I was tempted to break the spell and ask her what she was thinking about. Instead, I turned and cast my own lure. On the retrieve, instead of thinking about enticing a fish, I thought about all the times over all the years that I peered into those same waters. Seeking.

Watching my daughter do the same made me happy for her, that she could have that time. And for me. Fishing scores again.

I truly love boats and rods and reels and lures and marine electronics. I am a first-class fishing geek hooked for life. That's why I am so tickled to work with this great team at *Boating* to put out this special *Freshwater Buyers Guide* every year. In its pages—and in its videos and the website too—you will find what I think is the best information for helping you decide which fishing boat and fishing gear you might want to buy. Our entire team believes that.

I want to ask you to keep something else in mind though. As much as we love the boats and gear, we believe it's the experiences these things help deliver that count the most.

Enjoy the guide.

Kevin Falvey, Editor-in-Chief  
editor@boatingmag.com



### CITY BASS

Big bass in the big city? You betcha! Learn how urban anglers catch big bass on page 48.

As much as we love the boats and gear, we believe it's the experiences these things help deliver that count the most.



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# Making Waves

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## SCAN ME

For the full interview, go to [boatingmag.com/sarah-parvin](https://boatingmag.com/sarah-parvin) or scan this tag!

## Sarah “The Closer” Parvin Bluegill Expert

Sarah Parvin and her father, Dr. Dennis Olive, started growing trophy bass in their private 5-acre family pond in Alabama nearly three decades ago. After an unfortunate fish kill, they switched their focus to raising unusually large coppernose bluegill; so large, in fact, that it wouldn't be surprising if their pond, nicknamed the “Slab Lab,” produced a world record. We caught up with Parvin to find out more. —*Pete McDonald*

### What exactly is the Slab Lab?

It's a private lake that my dad and I have worked on for nearly 28 years. It was originally a trophy largemouth bass lake. But after a fish kill in 2018, we decided to start over. Much to our surprise, we realized that we had some very special coppernose bluegill in our lake. So we thought, let's grow those.

### Is Slab Lab a fishing destination?

We do a very limited amount. Right now we have universities studying our bluegill, as well as the USDA and the American Sport Fish Hatchery. They're trying to figure out what's happening, how our fish grow so large—even for being pellet-fed.

### Did you grow up fishing?

My entire family fishes [and has] for as long as I can remember. When my dad found the land to build his dream home, he dug the lake two years before he built his house. I still fish almost every day. Besides the bluegill, I also fish for bass in local lakes and go saltwater fishing with my brother. So, I do everything from our bluegill to offshore.

### Do you ever use a boat on your private lake?

We have an electric pontoon that we call the Slab Rocket. It can really fly (just kidding). But it's great for taking out four or five anglers at a time.

# A Lifesaving Donation

The Sea Tow Foundation, which offers loaner life jackets at 1,300 places in all 50 states, recently got a lot more to offer thanks to Newell Brands, which donated 10,000 of its Stearns and Coleman life jackets and floating cushions to the organization.

The Sea Tow Foundation is a nonprofit organization that promotes boating safety founded by membership towing service Sea Tow. Along with programs such as Sober Skipper and Flare Education, the foundation seeks to make it easier for boaters to practice safety on the water. The Life Jacket Loaner program provides adult and youth life jackets that are free to borrow for a day on the water. So far, it has provided over 100,000 life jackets to participating organizations around the country. But this past year, the foundation received over 250 Life Jacket Loaner applications from organizations across 46 states, which meant it needed thousands more life jackets than it had to fulfill the demand.

Newell Brands stepped in with its generous donation to help keep

boaters safe in locations where the Life Jacket Loaner program is nearby. If you have any gently used life jackets you'd like to donate, go to [boatingsafety.com/page/life-jacket-loaner-program](http://boatingsafety.com/page/life-jacket-loaner-program). —Pete McDonald



PHOTOS: COURTESY SEA TOW FOUNDATION



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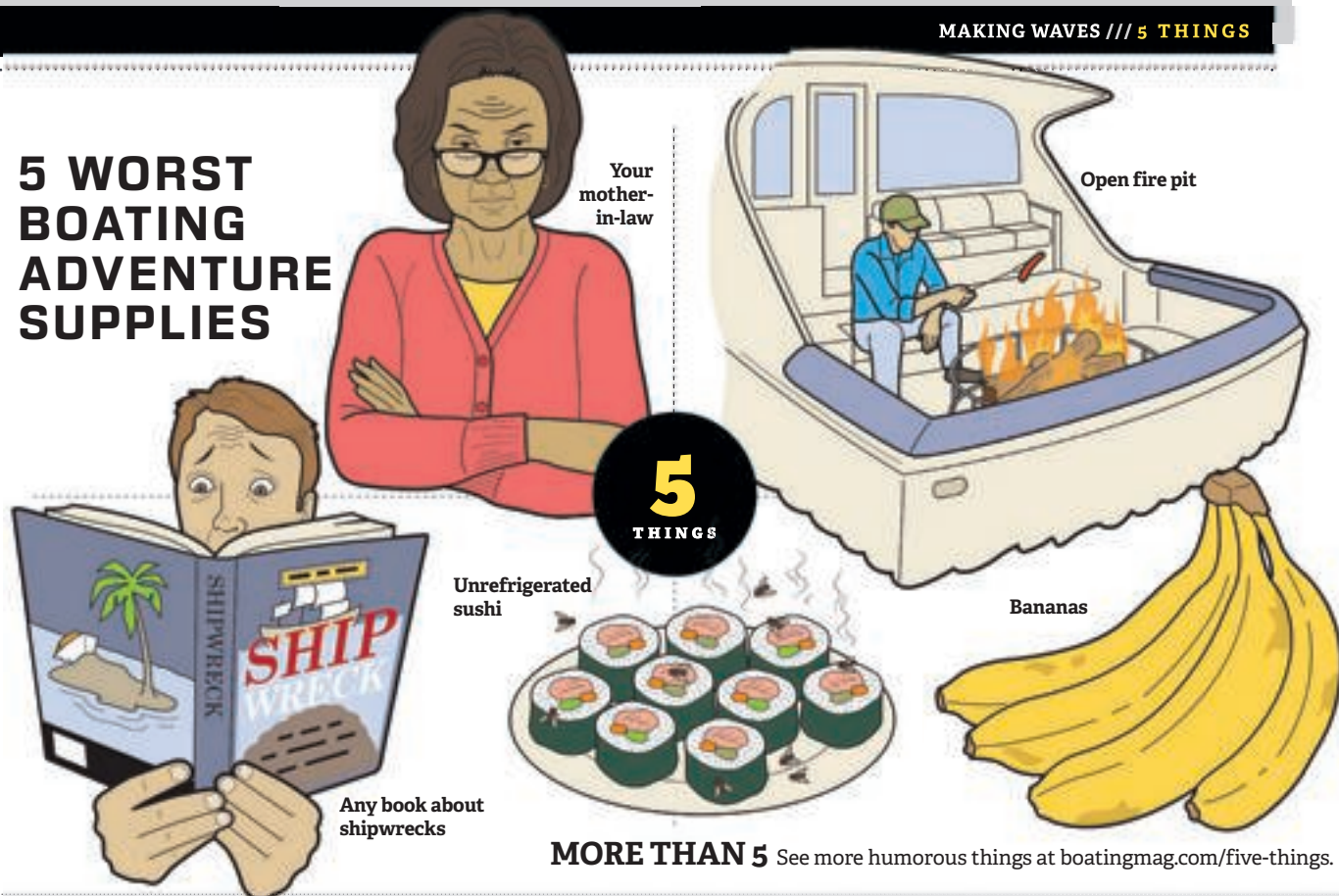
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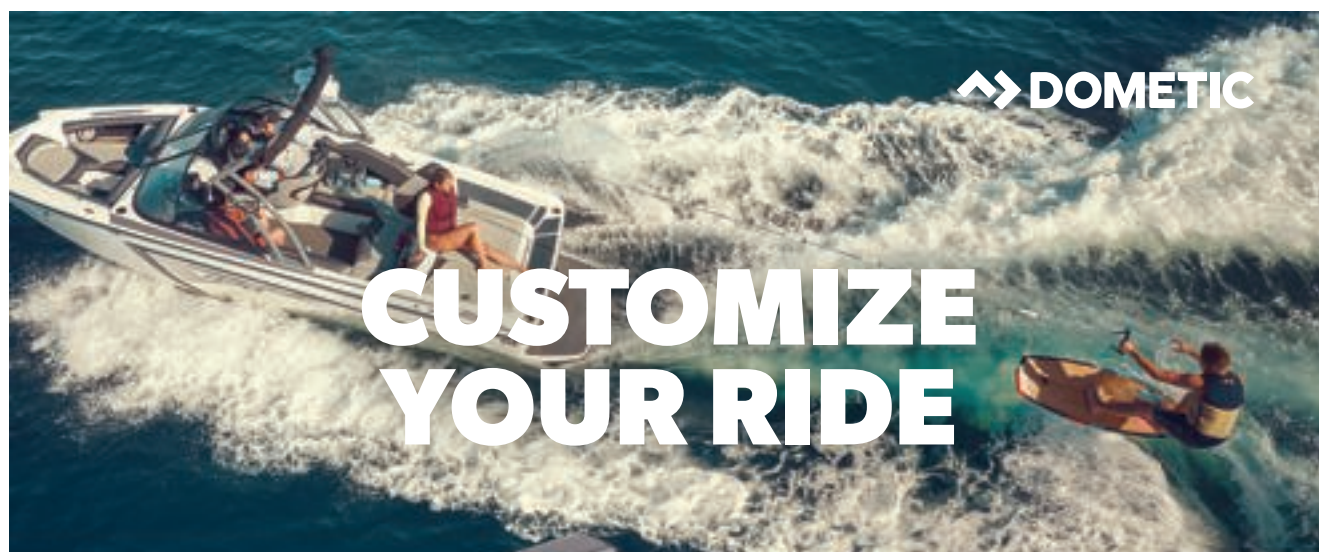


## 5 WORST BOATING ADVENTURE SUPPLIES

ILLUSTRATIONS: COLIN HAYES



**MORE THAN 5** See more humorous things at [boatingmag.com/five-things](http://boatingmag.com/five-things).



# CUSTOMIZE YOUR RIDE



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## DIY

+ Weekend Workbook

## SKILL LEVEL



2 OF 5

## FINISH TIME

Approx. 2 hours

## TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

- Victron Energy Blue Power IP65 SmartShunt Battery Monitor 500A/50mV (\$130.90; [hodge marine.com](http://hodge marine.com))
- Stainless-steel fasteners to mount the SmartShunt
- Power drill or drill-bit set
- Screwdrivers and wrench set
- High-amp marine fuse or circuit breaker
- Positive and negative marine battery cables and eye connectors
- Eye and clothing protection

## TIP

Victron's IP65 SmartShunt has two other built-in wires besides the red power wire discussed in this project. A fused gray aux wire is reserved for connecting dual-battery systems in various configurations and connecting a temperature sensor. A black VE Direct cable and plug connects Victron GX devices, such as helm displays. To learn more, visit [victronenergy.com](http://victronenergy.com).

# INSTALLING A WIRELESS MARINE BATTERY MONITOR

Victron Energy's SmartShunt lets you check battery state of charge on a mobile device.

A battery monitor is like a gas gauge, showing you how much electrical power is left (known as state of charge) as well as other vital signs. Today adding a monitor to a boat battery is easier than ever, thanks to systems from brands such as Balmar, Blue Sea Systems, Mastervolt, Veratron, Victron and Xantrex.

While most have helm gauges or displays, some feature the ability to use a mobile device instead. The Victron SmartShunt system, for example, uses Bluetooth to link wirelessly to your phone or tablet with the VictronConnect app.

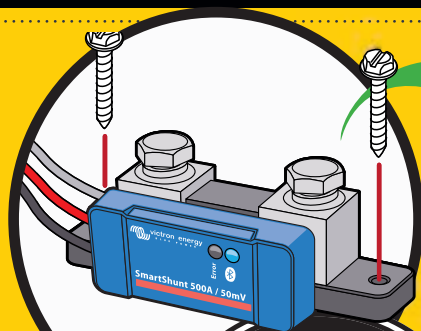
While the SmartShunt can also be hard-wired to a Victron GX touchscreen, the app option minimizes wire runs, connections and new holes in the dash. It also frees up space on small dashes.

The SmartShunt can be installed and configured to monitor multiple batteries, but we focus on a single house battery for this installation. The SmartShunt is available in 500-, 1,000- and 2,000-amp loads. Select a size that exceeds your boat battery's overall maximum amperage for input and output. We used the 500-amp model

for this project. The SmartShunt works with all types of batteries, including flooded-cell and AGM lead-acid versions and lithium iron phosphate.

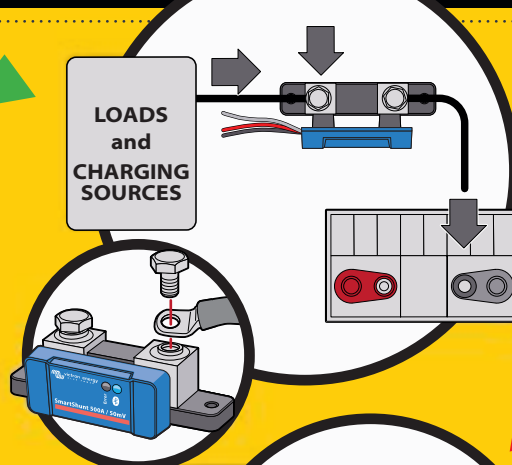
Before starting the installation, remove metal jewelry, such as rings, bracelets and watches, because these can produce short circuits that melt metal and cause burns. Be careful with metal tools, which can do the same. Wear eye and clothing protection to guard against acid burns, and avoid smoking, open flames, and sparks in the vicinity of a battery. —*Jim Hendricks*





## TIP

To calculate the proper AWG-size marine-grade cable and fuse or breaker for your battery system, visit [circuitwizard.bluesea.com/#](http://circuitwizard.bluesea.com/#).

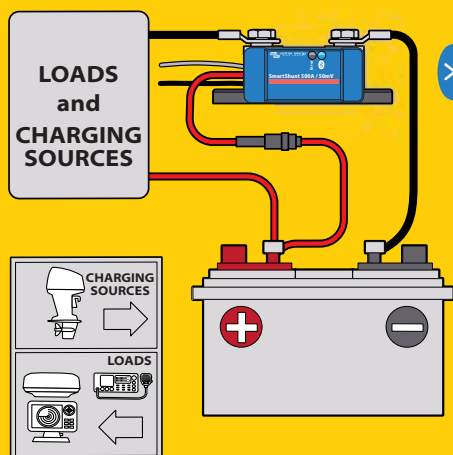


LOADS and CHARGING SOURCES

LOADS and CHARGING SOURCES

## + TEMPERATURE SENSOR

Victron also offers an optional battery temperature sensor (\$26.00; [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)) that connects in line with the SmartShunt's red power wire or gray aux wire. However, you will need to splice in the temperature-sensor wires with the red and gray wires using a crimp connector or solder splice, along with heat-shrink tubing to ensure a durable and waterproof connection.

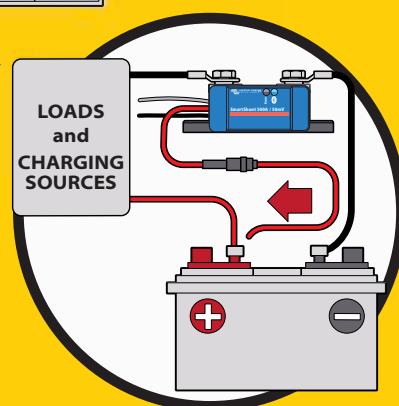


LOADS and CHARGING SOURCES



## TIP

Although the battery monitor automatically identifies the voltage of battery systems ranging from 12 to 48 volts, it is good practice to check the app to see if the setting is correct, not only for nominal voltage (e.g., 12 volts), but also the fully charged voltage (e.g., 13.2 volts).



LOADS and CHARGING SOURCES

### MOUNT THE SENSOR

The SmartShunt sports an IP65 waterproof rating but still mount it in a fairly dry area on board your boat. Choose a mounting location as close to the battery as possible. Use the 5.5 mm holes in the base to screw or through-bolt the SmartShunt to a vertical or horizontal hard surface. The 500- and 1,000-amp models have two mounting holes, while the 2,000-amp model has four. Mounting screws are not included. Choose the appropriate-size stainless-steel hardware to securely install the SmartShunt sensor.

### BATTERY NEGATIVE TO SENSOR

**CONNECT** Connect the negative battery terminal to the M10 bolt on the "battery minus" side of the SmartShunt using a black (to denote negative) marine-grade battery cable in the appropriate AWG size for the amperage load for your boat's battery system. Securely tighten all cable bolts and nuts. Note that there should be no other connections on this side of the shunt or on the negative battery terminal. Any loads or chargers connected here will be excluded from the battery's state-of-charge calculation.

### SENSOR NEGATIVE TO SYSTEM

**USE** Use a black marine-grade electrical cable to connect the negative terminal of your boat's DC onboard electrical system to the M10 bolt on the "load minus" side of the SmartShunt sensor. Again, ensure that the cable size doesn't exceed the maximum amperage load for your boat's battery system. Securely tighten all cable bolts and nuts. Make sure that the negative of all DC loads of items such as inverters, battery chargers, solar chargers and other charge sources are connected after the shunt.

### POSITIVE CABLE CONNECTIONS

**USE** Use a red battery cable and fuse or breaker to connect the positive battery terminal to the boat's DC electrical system. Make sure the cable size matches the amperage load for your boat's battery system and that the fuse or breaker offers the appropriate amperage rating for the battery's electrical load. Connect the VBatt+ red wire with the inline fuse from the SmartShunt to the battery's positive terminal. Tighten all cable bolts and nuts. The monitor is now powered and ready to configure (see next step).

### CONFIGURE THE SMARTSHUNT

**DOWNLOAD** Download the VictronConnect app on your mobile device. Open the app and connect via Bluetooth to the SmartShunt. Look for the battery monitor to appear in the device list in the "local" or "VRM" tab. Click on the battery monitor and enter the default PIN code: 000000. The app will ask you to change the PIN code for security. Use the app to configure settings, such as the battery capacity, amp load, alarm thresholds and more. For more details, scan the QR code on the sensor.

# VISION QUEST

As an avid boater and angler, sunglasses for me have always been a tool, a way to cut down the glare on the water and get a clearer picture of what lurks beneath.



**B**

But until recently, I never cared about more than the frames and whether they were polarized. Then, in a classic case of middle-age creep, I started bringing a pair of drugstore cheaters on board so I could see the tag end of monofilament to tie a knot or read the data on an electronics display without squinting. It all came to a head this fall while looking for a new pair of Costa Del Mar sunglasses online, when I clicked on the box that read “add Rx lenses.” And I have to say, getting shades with prescription lenses has been a game-changer.

“We all have that same dynamic as we get older,” says John Sanchez, VP of Global Product Strategy for Costa Del Mar. “Pretty soon, you’re sitting on the water saying, ‘What’s happened to me?’”

What Sanchez was trying to tell me was,

I’m not alone. He’s seen prescription sunglasses go from less than 5 percent of total sunglasses sales at Costa Del Mar to around 25 to 30 percent. Here are a few reasons why.

## FATIGUE REDUCTION

I started wearing regular prescription glasses only a few years ago, first for reading or driving at

kind of squint for you,” Sanchez says.

When you’re not straining when trying to do routine tasks on the water, such as tying knots, reading charts, surveying your surroundings, or seeing the next channel marker, your day gets much easier.

**GLARE REDUCTION** Because recreational boats



night. Now I wear them all day long, and they not only help prevent eyestrain, but I also feel less tired. Switching to Rx sunglasses does the same thing on the water.

“Prescription lenses

often have decks made of white fiberglass, the sun’s rays come at you from above, and bounce off the boat and back up at you. Having quality polarized lenses such as Costa’s 580s eliminates a lot of

the harmful UV rays that can damage the eyes. Not having to constantly take them off to see things, or swap them out with a pair of regular glasses that offer no glare protection, is that much better for your eyes.

I should add that my eye doctor recommended prescription sunglasses for another reason: preventing pterygium, a condition commonly known as “surfer’s eye.” He noticed my eyes had started to yellow a bit around the edges and show more blood vessels. He said that was due to a lifetime of exposure to the sun and wind on the water. Wearing sunglasses all the time while outdoors can prevent surfer’s eye from worsening to the point of discomfort or blurred vision.

**CUSTOM FIT** Some people would say the solution is not to opt for an expensive prescription but to buy a sunglasses version of drugstore cheaters. This may be well and good, but with a brand like Costa,

you can get a version of its lenses to match your exact prescription.

“If you buy a Costa Rx, you will get back an authentic 580 lens made in our lab,” Sanchez says.

This is important to note because some sunglasses-makers provide only their frames, and a third-party source will make the prescription lens, so you lose some of the unique properties that make certain brands’ regular polarized lenses so good.

In my case, with a prescription for progressive lenses, this proved particularly important. I sent my prescription to Costa along with my minus value, pupil distance and preferred frame shape, and its lab technicians custom-made them to fit my specifications. And I have to say, they’re totally worth it now that I wear them every day.

When it comes to utilizing prescription polarized sunglasses on board, I have seen the light. —Pete McDonald



# SAFE LANDING

Your landing net makes a difference in whether a fish is released in good condition or suffers injuries.

I have a pet peeve. Well, actually, I have a lot, but one concerns landing nets. Too often I see anglers using nets with mesh that measures anywhere from 1 to 2 inches across. Large mesh netting is fine if you intend to keep a fish, but it's horrible for catch-and-release. I mean, really horrible.

**TAIL INJURIES** Here's the problem I see with large-mesh netting: The fish's tail (aka caudal fin) gets squeezed through the mesh like Velveeta through a cheese slicer. It splits and tears the tender membranes between the rays of the fin. This can affect soft dorsal and anal fins

too, inflicting multiple tears. I've seen the injuries too many times on released fish, and every time it makes me cringe.

**CUTS AND SCRAPES** The netting material itself can also hurt fish. Rough nylon netting is more likely to cut and scrape fins and the sides of fish. The shape of the net is also a factor because many nets are like sacks that literally bend thrashing fish in half, pressing the fins farther through mesh, resulting in deeper tears. There's no way for the tears to heal, and the open wounds can lead to infections that ultimately result in the slow and debilitating demise of the released fish.

**FISH-FRIENDLY NET MESH** However, there is a solution, and it comes in the form of fish-friendly landing nets, aka conservation nets, from companies such as Frabill and Promar. A great example is the Frabill Trophy Haul series of nets (from \$89.99 to \$119.99). The netting features ½-inch mesh that helps prevent tears and splits to the tail. The netting material is also rubber-coated; Frabill calls it the Coated Conservation Mesh. This material is softer and less abrasive, and that reduces scrapes and cuts to fish.

**LANDING PADS** Nets in the Trophy Haul series also have a special shape. The net is flat

on the bottom, and that helps cradle the fish rather than bend it half, especially if you avoid lifting the fish into the boat. Promar's Premier Angler Landing Nets (\$31.99 to 57.99) have even wider flat areas at the bottom, not to mention fine-mesh netting, to care for fish you plan to release.

The next time you're shopping for a landing net, stop to think about my pet peeve. Or at least think about the fish, especially if you might need to release a sub-legal-size fish or you just plan to practice catch-and-release. Fish-friendly landing nets are the way to go. —Jim Hendricks



**NET RESULT** Traditional nets (lower left) can tear fins, while fish-friendly nets (above) prove gentler to fish that you plan to release.



**GOOD SHAPE** Nets with landing pads at the bottom help the fish lie flat rather than bending it in half and inducing injuries.

# VIRTUAL-REALITY FISHING

“Cast that way, about 40 feet,” said Lake Michigan fishing guide Capt. Chris Noffsinger, pointing off the bow at roughly ten o’clock. I readily complied, flicking a drop-shot-rigged worm to the spot and leaving the bail open so that it would sink straight down. After hitting bottom and twitching the rod tip a couple of times, I felt a subtle bite and set the hook hard on a 3½-pound smallmouth bass.

**T**

To the casual observer, it may have seemed that Noffsinger was some smallmouth savant or possessed X-ray vision. I knew, however, that his “secret power” was the Lowrance Active Target live sonar display.

**LIVE REVOLUTION** Live-action sonar has revolutionized fishing, particularly in fresh water. A new generation of anglers—especially those who fish tournaments—has created a live-sonar bandwagon and helped popularize a world of virtual-reality fishing.

These anglers are easy to spot. They stand in the bow of their boats, rods at the ready, heads down and eyes fixed on a large LCD



**REAL TIME** Systems such as the Humminbird Mega Live sonar is the equivalent of a live video feed from the waters around the boat, letting you see fish, bait and your lure in real time.

touchscreen display. With one foot, they steer their trolling motors, changing the direction of the boat and scanning ahead to locate fish. Only when they see what they’re looking for on the sonar display

will they fire off a cast.

Live sonar from brands such as Garmin, Humminbird and Lowrance works like a medical sonogram, letting the angler aim a beam through the water column to see fish swimming in nearly real time on the display. I have literally watched fish rise to my sinking lure and eat it as it descended.

## TROLLING-MOTOR TRANSDUCERS

With transducers mounted on the bow trolling-motor shaft, anglers can easily steer the sonar beam to find and track fish. With their eyes peeled on the display, they’ll aim their fish-tracking technology

underneath docks, off shoreline stumps and out in open water, looking for suspended fish or bass that are corralling a school of bait.

This ability to see fish as they are, where they are, and when they are has changed the game. Now anglers can not only see an individual fish or group of fish on the screen, but they also can determine where they are in relation to the boat and which direction they are moving.

Over a relatively short time, this technology has spread like wildfire through the angling ranks. Garmin first introduced LiveScope about five years ago and followed up with LiveScope Plus in 2022,

**DIFFERENT VIEWS** Lowrance’s Active Target 2 and other live sonar systems offer a variety of views. This one is Scout mode.







**'DUCER MOUNT** Live sonar transducers typically mount on the bow trolling motor, which allows the angler to swivel the beam in different directions to find fish. A connected MFD lets anglers view the live-sonar imagery.



with its Forward, Down, and Landscape views, and its included trolling-motor shaft mount.

#### DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING

"When you first use it, it takes a little practice to understand what you're seeing," advises Shaw Grigsby, a Lowrance-sponsored bass pro with more than \$2.3 million in career winnings.

"When you get good at reading the display, you can tell the size and even the species of the fish you're looking at," Grigsby adds. "There's never a situation where I don't have my ActiveTarget 2 running." The pro sees a lot of fish in open water that he never would have known

about before, but he also likes seeing how fish react to baits. "This helps me adjust my technique and figure out a pattern for what's working," he points out.

**PROS AND JOES** Live-sonar technology has quickly trickled down from ranks of professional fishing to regular Joes across the country. As a result, a growing number of weekend warriors are quickly catching on to the advantages of live sonar and how it can help put more fish in the boat. Once you learn to decipher the blips and blobs moving around on the screen and gain confidence in what you're seeing, you might never again waste time fishing empty water. —Ron Ballanti

offering 35 percent better target separation, sharper resolution, and reduced noise, along with three modes: Forward, Down and Perspective. A few months later, Garmin added LiveScopeXR, providing extended sonar range out to 500 feet in front of or below the boat.

Lowrance unveiled its ActiveTarget live sonar in 2020 to rapid acceptance by Major League Fishing pros and other competitive anglers. At the end of 2022, the company unveiled ActiveTarget 2, delivering higher-resolution views of fish movement and smoother and more consistent imaging across the entire range in Forward, Down and Scout views.

Humminbird entered

the game in 2021 with its Mega Live Imaging, which is today compatible with all Humminbird APEX and SOLIX models and HELIX 8-12 GN3 and HELIX 7-15 G4N models. Mega Live lets anglers view everything down, out and around the boat



BL

BOATINGLAB  
By Randy Vance

## RAIN GEAR

Rain gear is something boaters never want to need but too often do. We decided to test rain gear that is light, stowable and packable, so it's always nearby just in case.

### HOW WE TESTED

We evaluated each garment for rainy-day readiness and general wearability. Would it pack and stow? Is it comfortable? Lined jackets are more comfortable than unlined, but they are bulkier. They can also be warmer than unlined jackets, a consideration for warm-weather wear. What about ease of use? We tested all the zippers for watertightness and to see if they were easy to seal and operate. All the brands we tested touted water-resistant zippers. We wanted to know how resistant they were.

### WATERTIGHT?

We placed red tissue paper behind each zipper, sealed it, then hung the jacket on a hanger in front of a horizontal shower for five minutes. After five minutes, we let the garment drip-dry for an hour to be certain that we didn't allow water in while inspecting the tissue paper. What we found surprised us. Our results were marked dry, wet or damp. None of the main zippers leaked. Most of the pocket zippers allowed moisture in during the five-minute downpour.



**Deluge-proof**  
All zippers were bone-dry. A D-ring awaits the ECOS lanyard for safety.

**GILL**  
**ASPECT**  
\$250; gillmarine.com

The Xplore two-layer fabric is watertight, and the lining with underarm mesh moves moisture away from the body. It lacks the insulation of the Navigator, so it is ideal for spring to fall rains. A YKK AquaGuard zipper and double storm flap keep out water. Right and left hand-warmer pockets are zippered with storm flaps and are large enough to hold most

SLR cameras. Exterior breast pockets are zippered and mohair-lined for hand-warming comfort. Elastic shock cords on the hood and hem adjust the trim fit. Elastic hem cords are adjustable under both hand-warmer pockets.

**POCKETS:** Dry  
**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** Zips to the chin, and the jacket lining extends to the chin, adding comfort.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:** Zipper pulls are made of cord, with shrink tubing over the knots for added friction.

**WE NOTICED:** The double storm flap helps protect the zipper from water intrusion—and this zipper is right-handed.

**WE LIKED:** The jacket has a synthetic lining that is comfortable and fights the

clammy feel of linerless jackets. Dual exterior breast pockets and one interior breast pocket are large enough for the largest smartphones.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** Our XL fit comfortably with good freedom of motion over a T-shirt.

**COLORS:** Shadow, twilight blue and glacier white

**MEN'S SIZES:** M to 3XL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** XS to 4XL





**For the Bucks** Sitka even has H<sub>2</sub>O-proof zippered armpits for ventilation.



**Go Fish** Grundén's is the choice of commercial watermen for good reason.



**Hardcore** Cozy and dry (except the pockets), the camo pattern is urban-chic.

### SITKA GEAR DEW POINT RAIN JACKET \$339; sitkagear.com

Sitka has made its name among hunters and anglers, but the Dew Point rain jacket in solid colors is appealing to boaters. The jacket is packable and provides excellent comfort and rain protection. This three-layer Gore-Tex fabric makes a super-light jacket that wears as if it has a liner. The outer shell is durable, the membrane is breathable and watertight, and the inner layer is a woven nylon that helps ventilate the jacket. Color selections will please boaters, anglers and hunters.

**POCKETS:** Dry  
**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** Zips to the chin with or without the hood up.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:** Corded pulls are easier to find and grasp than straight tabs, without offering snag points.

**WE NOTICED:** The minimalist design is perfect as a just-in-case garment, but its waterproof utility makes it a go-to for milder weather.

**WE LIKED:** The long hand-warmer pockets are zippered and water-resistant, and the opening is large and accessible under inflatable life jackets.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** Sizing is accurate based on chest measurements.

**COLORS:** Deep water, black, olive, gray and two camo patterns

**MEN'S SIZES:** M to XXXL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** NA

### GRUNDÉN'S CHARTER \$299 to \$320; grundens.com

Gore-Tex is the most respected brand in waterproof fabric, but the manufacturers that use it can claim the brand only if they create the garment according to strict guidelines intended to create a long-wearing, water-resistant garment. The Paclite fabric is two layers and nylon-bonded to a Gore-Tex membrane, with a sealed seam and pleated elbows for flexibility. Waterproof pockets, Velcro-fastened storm flaps over a watertight zipper, and Velcro cuffs keep out water. It zips to the chin and has a mohair collar, plus an elastic adjustable hood and waistband.

**POCKETS:** Damp  
**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** Zips to the chin, and collar is mohair-lined.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:** Larger zipper pulls would be helpful.

**WE NOTICED:** Waistband elastic is adjusted on the right rather than left and right.

**WE LIKED:** This jacket is easily packable and ideal for a just-in-case garment when rain is possible but not expected. Its rain protection is top-notch.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** Roomy at size, allowing a layer underneath for warmth if needed.

**COLORS:** Blue, surf, black and gray refractive camo

**MEN'S SIZES:** S to XXXL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** XS to XL

### AFTCO BARRICADE JACKET \$249; aftco.com

I liked this the second I opened the zipper—it zips to the chin with a comfortable liner and zips from the bottom to better accommodate seated boaters. The outer cuffs and liner cuffs have Velcro fasteners to snug them and prevent water from entering. Like the Sitka in design, the three-layer fabric has a tough shell, a water-resistant membrane and a bonded liner for comfort. The double storm flaps go behind the zipper and in front, adding protection to the watertight YKK zipper. The hood has corded elastic for rim and length adjustments. The waistband cords feature two cinches to ease use.

**POCKETS:** Damp  
**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** Zips to the chin, with a soft protective liner for comfort.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:** Corded pulls were easy to find. The zippers were smooth, but the main zipper required a few cycles to break in.

**WE NOTICED:** A right-hand D-ring makes a handy safety-lanyard connection.

**WE LIKED:** The jacket is tightly stitched and nicely fitted.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** Sizing is generous. For a trim fit, consider one size smaller.

**COLOR:** Green acid camo, dark digi camo, black and gray

**MEN'S SIZES:** S to XXL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** NA

**Points North**

Insulated, damn near watertight and a roll-away hood make it a winner.

**GILL****NAVIGATOR**

\$235; gillmarine.com

The Navigator is made of a two-layer fabric shell and liner that Gill calls Xplore two-layer. A thermal-insulation layer is thin but effective in the cold, and yet we also found it comfortable to wear in warmer weather for rain protection. Zippers are sealed for optimal water repellency, and the rollaway hood is adjustable for height and width. Velcro cuffs resist water intrusion, and the silicone-rubber pull tab is easy to manage, even while wearing gloves. The waist is snug but not restrictive and can be further tightened with internal elastic waist cords. An iPhone 13 Pro fits in the left-side interior breast pocket.

**POCKETS:** Damp

**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** Zips to the chin, and collar is mohair-lined.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:**

Silicone tabs on the cuffs and zippers are easy to grasp with gloved or wet hands.

**WE NOTICED:** Gill is European-made; consequently, many models have a left-hand zipper style most common there.

**WE LIKED:** Nonbulky fabric and the seam-sealed waterproof membrane gave good moisture protection, and the thermal insulation adapted to warmer and cooler weather.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** The XXL fit comparably to most other brands' XL.

**COLORS:** Graphite and blue

**MEN'S SIZES:** S to XXL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** 4 to 12

**Featherweight**

Pockets have mesh linings, but the jacket is bone-dry and windproof.

**COLUMBIA****SKIFF**

\$59 to \$112; amazon.com

This is a lightweight jacket you can stuff in your bag and have in case of unexpected rain. The breathable membrane is comfortable against the skin, but even more so with a thin layer beneath. It is useful as a windbreaker against an unexpected chill. Zippers are easy to work, and hand-warmer pockets remained dry in our tests. The hood is adjustable for height and has an elastic drawstring to cinch it around the face.

**POCKETS:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** Zips to the chin, but the lack of lining might cause chafing after long use.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:**

Zippers are easy and smooth. Larger pulls could be easier to grasp.

**WE NOTICED:** It's lighter, linerless design means no inner pockets or breast pocket, but its hand-warmer pockets stayed dry in our tests.

**WE LIKED:** The simple, dry, packable design and quality construction with sealed seams make it a bargain.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** Roomy enough but not oversize.

**COLORS:** Black and metal

**MEN'S SIZES:** S to XXL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** NA

**Cozy Warm**

Sharp-looking protection but lacks a hood, so you'll want to use a rain hat.

**HELLY HANSEN****HP RACING JACKET**

\$135; hellyhansen.com

We were surprised at the comfortable price on this upscale brand of outdoor wear. Its design is ideal for powerboating in inclement weather, and the lining makes it comfortable in warm or cool weather as a windbreaker. It also eliminates the clammy feel of the waterproof membrane against the skin, adding comfort and versatility. The collar is mohair-lined for a chafe-free fit. Helly makes a number of ski garments, and we couldn't see why this one wouldn't make a useful shell on warmer days on the slopes.

**POCKETS:** Damp

**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** Zips to the chin, and collar is mohair-lined.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:**

All zippers have standard pulls that hide behind the storm flaps for a snag-free design.

**WE NOTICED:** The waterproof outer shell is comfortably lined with nylon and soft mesh.

**WE LIKED:** The hood-free design is ideal for wearing a rain hat. The Dubliner is similar (\$130) and has a hood, if preferred.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** Sizing is roomy, but a size up might better accommodate layering.

**COLOR:** Ebony and gray

**MEN'S SIZES:** S to XXL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** NA



**Buttoned Up**  
The cheapest raincoat tested is bone-dry. Amazing.

**Alaska-Worthy**  
Comfortable for weeklong trips and priced just right.



**MAGELLAN'S**  
FISHGEAR LIGHTWEIGHT  
RAIN JACKET  
\$49.99; magellans.com

This is a sharp-looking jacket with a two-toned black-and-heather design. It's made with a TPU membrane—a polyester fabric bonded to a polyurethane membrane in a way that allows moisture vapor to escape from within but resists moisture intrusion. Large hand-warmer pockets and a large left-hand breast pocket keep gear handy, and zippers are water-resistant. The main zipper is also water-resistant, protected by a Velcro-secured outer storm flap and assisted by an inner storm flap. Elastic drawstrings adjust the hem and hood. The hood fit is also adjusted with a Velcro strap that raises the rim over the brow.

**POCKETS:** Dry  
**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** Zips to the chin. The nylon lining is thin but does mitigate chafing.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:** Zippers work smoothly, but larger pulls would be handy.

**WE NOTICED:** The interior breast pocket will not hold the largest phones, but the exterior pocket will.

**WE LIKED:** Elastic neoprene cuffs comfortably cinch the liner around the wrist, and Velcro wrist straps snug up the shell.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** On target

**COLOR:** Heather gray

**MEN'S SIZES:** S to XXL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** NA



**HUK**  
GRAND BANKS  
\$180; hukgear.com

Velcro secures a double storm flap over the waterproof YKK zipper. Cuffs are secured with elastic and Velcro, reducing water access without restricting movement. A left breast pocket closes with a waterproof YKK zipper. Left and right hand-warmer pockets are protected from water with YKK waterproof zippers and storm flaps. All pockets are generous in size and can hold large smartphones. Zipping the jacket to the chin requires wearing the hood. The cinch adjustments are within the hood lining.

**POCKETS:** Damp  
**MAIN ZIPPER:** Dry

**MAIN ZIPPER FUNCTION:** It actually zips over the mouth, and the hood-adjustment cinches are hidden in the lining.

**ZIPPERS/TABS EASY TO WORK:** Larger zipper pulls would be easier to find and operate, but anglers likely prefer the minimalistic snag-free design.

**WE NOTICED:** The hem adjusts with elastic cords, and the adjustment cinches are in the main hand-warmer pockets, where they won't snag.

**WE LIKED:** The jacket has a handsome cut, and we liked the shadowed gray camo with the black cape and shoulders. It is an outstanding bargain for spring and summer rain.

**SIZE APPROPRIATE:** Roomy at size, allowing a layer underneath for warmth if needed.

**COLOR:** Gray camo

**MEN'S SIZES:** S to XXL

**WOMEN'S SIZES:** NA

## PROOFING GEAR

We aren't scientists or engineers, but we consider ourselves layman experts based on our experience in the field and our study and observation of real scientific tests. We did this test three years ago on many of the same brands, and water resistance has improved dramatically since then. Even those rain shells with damp pocket tissues in our test are worthy of consideration, and your field experience might differ from our conscientious layman tests. I'd take any one of these jackets on a rainy boating day.

## HISTORY OF DRY

A product of the space race of the '60s, waterproof membranes had to be fine-tuned for the consumer after decades of testing and field use. It takes a waterproof membrane bonded to a durable, water-resistant shell to keep water out while allowing for steamy human sweat to escape. But the original fabric came in bolts that were cut and sewed, and the unsealed seams of the driest membrane leaked. Now manufacturers seal the seams, and they fashion the elbows, knees and stress points to flex with the wearer and bond to an outer shell treated with water-resistant material. Rain gear in general has never been drier.

## KEEPING IT DRY

The outer shell of rain gear is treated with a substance (DWR, in a spray can) that can wear off over time. The membrane can be compromised by human sweat, dirt and abrasion. Examine your jacket after use, and look for compromised stress points. There should be none for dozens and dozens of uses. But jackets should be washed after 30 or so trips afield to remove contaminants that block the pores from breathing outward. The outer waterproof shell should be re-treated with water-resistant spray when it no longer beads water.

BL

BOATINGLAB

By Randy Vance

## ELECTRONICS MOUNTS

All helm-station dashboards are not created equal. Some are limited in size, limiting the size of display, and some aren't angled for optimal view.

The wheel could be in the way or the windshield lets glare obscure the screen.

We found several effective cures for that in the form of adjustable arm mounts and one electronics pod—all designed for flexible mounting options for your GPS.

### RAM MOUNTS

**SHORT ARM WITH HIGH-TORQUE WRENCH RAM-D-115-C-KNOB9H**  
\$154.49; [rammount.com](http://rammount.com)

This is the most experienced company in adjustable electronics mounts. RAM Mounts has been making them for law enforcement, military, rescue, aviation and marine use for decades. The powder-coated aluminum design features a ball and socket at both the boat's and device's end mounting plates.

**HOW IT WORKS:** The ball-mount system is similar to the ball mount on a tripod. Loosen a single clamping bolt on the center of the arm to adjust the base plate and electronics plates in an infinite number of angles. The cast-aluminum ball has a hardened rubber coating to absorb the shock of boating through chop and seas. The ball might have a mounting plate to

affix to a dash or bulkhead, and a second ball plate that accepts the gimbal mount for the device.

**WE LIKE:** The device is infinitely adjustable. Longer arms are available, and more than one arm can be joined with a double ball joint to wrap the gimbal mount around a corner. The high-torque wrench included (\$24.49 when sold separately) has an adjustable lever to offer optimal leverage on the jam nut for a solid hookup—a particularly helpful device in cold weather when the rubber is harder.

**ACHILLES' HEEL:** The device is tricky to adjust without help because loosening the jam nut loosens both the base ball

and the gimbal ball, making the mount wiggle like a rubber worm. Gripping the ball you don't want to adjust can add enough friction to hold it while you adjust and tighten the other.

**MOUNTING TIPS:** Use  $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch through-bolts with fender washers under Nyloc nuts. For an uneven surface, such as a curved console of a deck boat, use rubber washers to fill gaps.

**HEIGHT:** 7.325 in.  
**GIMBAL PLATE:** 6.25-by-2 in.  
**BASE PLATE:** 3.6 in.  
**BALL-SIZE DIAMETER:** 2.25 in.  
**WEIGHT:** 2.88 lb.  
**CAPACITY:** 6 lb.  
**GIMBAL PLATE:** Universal

**DO THE TWIST** The optional wrench handle adjusts for tightening to maximum torque.







#### SWINGER

Dual swing arms allow side-wall mounting to swing the display toward the skipper.

### RAM MOUNTS

#### SWING-ARM MOUNT

RAM-109V-1U

\$134.99; rammount.com

RAM Mounts makes mounts for electronics from mobile phones to large multifunction displays, with capacities from a few ounces to over 10 pounds, which are known for their shock-absorbing capacity and military-grade construction.

**HOW IT WORKS:** The double swing-arm mount is designed to attach to a vertical bulkhead with a side-mount plate. A tabletop plate is available. Once attached, the device can swivel on two arms, giving many viewing directions but only one horizontal angle. Tighten each arm with a large knob without using any tools.

**WE LIKE:** The large mounting plate is designed for a vertical bulkhead, but is also curved inside to snug up to 2-inch tubing, adding still another mounting option. Two articulated arms allow it to swing the display forward or back. It can be mounted high for hanging a display overhead, and is made of rugged, powder-coated aluminum.

**ACHILLES' HEEL:** The device has no horizontal adjustment as packaged, but a Horizontal Swing Arm with Double Ball Mount is available (PAM-109H-2, \$131.49).

**MOUNTING TIPS:** Heavy rubber washers help adjust the horizontal angle and accommodate uneven surfaces. For more horizontal adjustment, use aluminum spacers with fender washers.

**HEIGHT:** 7.125 in. from base to top of gimbal; 11.58 in. overall

**GIMBAL PLATE:** 6.25-by-2 in.

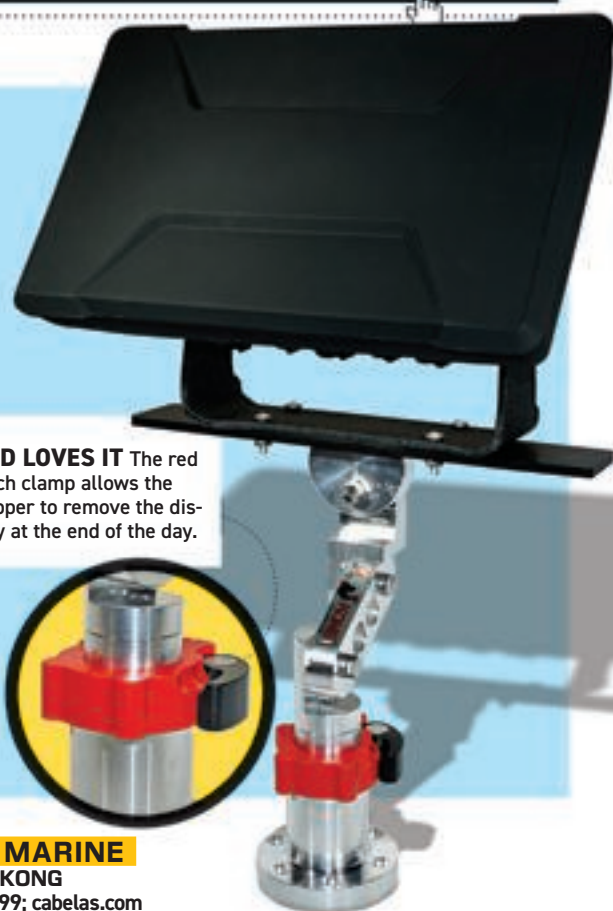
**BASE PLATE:** 3.9-by-4.85 in.

**BALL SIZE DIAMETER:** NA

**WEIGHT:** 3.71 lb.

**CAPACITY:** 8 lb.

**GIMBAL PLATE:** Universal



**KVD LOVES IT** The red pinch clamp allows the skipper to remove the display at the end of the day.

### T-H MARINE

#### KVD KONG

\$399.99; cabelas.com

T-H Marine is one of the most fertile grounds for marine innovation in America. Kevin Van Dam, for which this display mount is named, is the most successful angler nationwide and a Nitro Boats fishing pro. So, KVD's endorsement has some weight to it.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Machined from billet aluminum, the device is adjustable at three elbow joints, giving the boater options for vertical and horizontal adjustments. Each elbow has a series of pins on one piece and matching sockets on the other. The desired height and angle are accomplished by choosing the appropriate sockets for the pins. The billet base bolts down on either a horizontal or vertical surface as required.

**WE LIKE:** First of all, the highly polished, precisely milled construction is sharp to look at. The entire display and post can be easily removed for security by loosening the red locking ring.

**ACHILLES' HEEL:** The KVD Kong is not designed to adjust on the water. The optimal mounted position of the device can be adjusted only with a wrench and some amount of effort. Pins on one elbow came out of the sockets with difficulty.

**MOUNTING TIPS:** Don't mount the device any higher than necessary. The center arm can be removed entirely, or the gimbal arm can be removed to rotate the display 90 degrees for a side mount.

**HEIGHT:** 12 in.

**GIMBAL PLATE:** 12-by-2 in.

**BASE PLATE:** 3.5 in. diameter

**BALL SIZE DIAMETER:** NA

**WEIGHT:** 3.5 lb.

**CAPACITY:** Undetermined by manufacturer

**GIMBAL PLATE:** Universal

**BALZOUT****800-1100 SERIES**

\$2,000 with mounting hardware; balzoutllc.com

BalZout is a factory-direct manufacturer that specializes in electronics mounts. The mounts are all cleverly designed and handsome in appearance. Mounting arms of 4, 6, 9 and 12 inches offer many mounting positions and heights. They are made of billet aluminum with adjust-on-the-fly mounting knobs.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Three arms are mounted to a base, each one at 90 degrees of the other. Knurled mounting knobs are hand-adjustable, but an optional tightening pin allows for extra-secure adjustments. Each knuckle can be adjusted to many angles and locks in place, thanks to detent sockets and spring/ball stops in the opposing knuckle.

**WE LIKE:** The construction is handsome, with many color options available to allow custom-coloring of the arms, base and knurled knobs. Adjustment on the fly is not infinite as with the RAM Mounts, but it is an easy single-handed job, thanks to knuckle detents.

**ACHILLES' HEEL:** These mounts don't have the universal adjustability of ball-and-socket mounts, but they do have all the adjustments necessary for a secure, plumb mount. Side mounting the device on a bulkhead reduces adjustability, but an optional pivot knuckle (\$50) solves that problem.

**HEIGHT:** 7.75 in.

**GIMBAL PLATE:** 7.75-by-2 in.

**BASE PLATE:** 3.5 in. diameter

**BALL SIZE DIAMETER:** NA

**WEIGHT:** 3.5 lb.

**CAPACITY:** Undetermined by manufacturer

**GIMBAL PLATE:** Universal



**TOUGH NUT** The mount ratchets into place. Hand-tighten by using a screwdriver to lever in maximum torque.

**DASH PLUS**

When your dash won't hold it, this pod supplies a durable, watertight home.

**NAVPOD****PED70-5201**

\$539; navpod.com

NavPod is part of Ocean Equipment, a large manufacturer, inventor and distribution house of marine accessories and systems. NavPods are used by powerboaters on bow-mounted electronics, upper stations and cockpits where systems are apt to be exposed to the weather.

**HOW IT WORKS:** NavPods are designed to accept a display just like a dashboard, with an appropriate cutout to fit and the ability to through-bolt or clamp the device from inside. They come in fixed angles, with pod heights from 3 to 8 inches. Power and transducer cables feed through the mounting post, which bolts to the deck or another flat surface.

**WE LIKE:** The carbon-fiber look is sleek, and housing is UV-protected. Its watertight clamshell provides the same protection as a dash-mounted device and seals wiring holes as well. Its height and angle offer excellent viewability and minimize stooping to adjust or change pages.

**ACHILLES' HEEL:** Its mounting angle is fixed, with no way to adjust for mounting on an angled surface, and the pod is not able to rotate after mounting.

**HEIGHT:** 17 in.

**GIMBAL PLATE:** 7.75-by-2 in.

**BASE PLATE:** 6.5 in. diameter

**POD SIZE:** 9-by-12 in.

**WEIGHT:** 10 lb.

**CAPACITY:** 12-in. display

**GIMBAL PLATE:** NA





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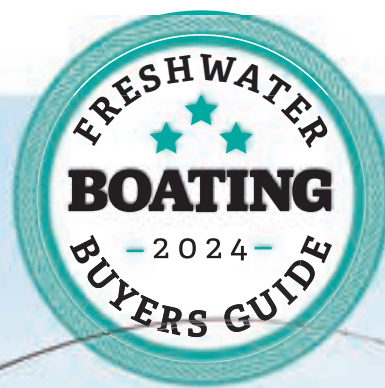
**W**hen you first head out on the lake or river and your boat is loaded up to fish, there's a scent that wafts from the water that every freshwater angler recognizes, no matter where in the country you're fishing. That freshwater aroma kicks your brain into gear because you know you'll soon be fishing. Here we've assembled reviews of 10 of the finest freshwater-fishing boats to get you on the water, so you can chase that feeling as you chase the fish. Whether you're fishing for bass, walleye, pike or panfish, these boats are rigged and ready to deliver you to your honey hole of choice.



**THE G3  
SPORTSMAN  
1710 PFX** is an  
aluminum boat  
that's ready for  
multispecies duty.

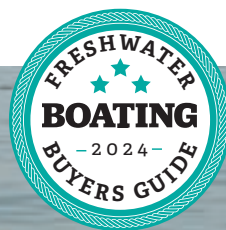
PHOTO: BILL DOSTER





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FLEX 19 DC PRO

# BASS CAT CARACAL STS



## HIGH POINTS

- STS (Soft Touch Series) hull improves load carrying, handling and wave-slicing capabilities.
- Reflex PE floor padding is soft on the feet.
- Bow panel holds dual graphs without using external mounting brackets.

## SEE THE VIDEO

To see our video review of the Bass Cat Caracal STS, scan this tag or visit [boatingmag.com/fwbbg24/basscatcaracalsts](http://boatingmag.com/fwbbg24/basscatcaracalsts).



**Price: \$109,570 (as tested)**

BOATING  
CERTIFIED  
TEST  
RESULTS

FIBERGLASS



**SPECS:** LOA: 20'2" BEAM: 8 1/2" DRAFT: 1'6" DRY WEIGHT: 1,890 lb. SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 4/785 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 52 gal. LIVEWELL CAPACITY: NA

**HOW WE TESTED:** ENGINE: Mercury 250 Pro XS FourStroke DRIVE/PROP: Outboard/Mercury Fury 14" x 24" 3-blade stainless steel GEAR RATIO: 1.75:1 FUEL LOAD: 52 gal. CREW WEIGHT: 500 lb.

The Caracal STS made nearly 75 mph at 6,100 rpm, with a short run in choppy water. This package is easily capable of 80 with better conditions. She's powerful but fuel-stingy, giving us 4.4 mpg at 31 mph at 3,500 rpm. Plenty of wakeboard rollers in rough water proved that the Caracal is solid, tight and like a nimble cat—always landed on her feet.

An entire new deck layout for 2024 is loaded with great features and engineering touches. The large bow panel permits flush mounting of two stacked graphs; three can be mounted with

additional brackets. A foredeck dash panel holds a main power switch and digital voltmeter. So you can land them right, there's a landing net scabbard and measuring board built into the deck, easy to access and quick to deploy. Hatch and latch designs keep gear beneath dry and secure. The recessed trolling-motor pedal pocket allows fore or aft adjustment of the pedal. Retractable, built-in rod straps on each gunwale complement a four-rod passenger rack. A rod-storage box on the port side and a dry locker to starboard flank a pair of large centerline storage boxes. A center step up to the foredeck hides a cooler.

The new sculpted console accepts a flush-mounted 12-inch graph. Ours was talking to the motor, displaying engine data as well as navigation and sonar displays. A tilt wheel and hydraulic steering with an optional Bob's Machine Shop hydraulic jack plate tames the Mercury 250XS. A two-tier center step between the seats houses a glove box in the upper portion and a cooler underneath. Billet grab bars are located port

SPEED			EFFICIENCY				OPERATION		
rpm	knots	mph	gph	mpg	mpg	naut. range	stat. range	n. mi.	s. mi.
1000	4.5	5.2	1.3	3.4	4.0	161.1	185.4	1	63
1500	6.1	7.1	2.4	2.6	2.9	119.5	137.5	5	67
2000	6.6	7.6	4.1	1.6	1.9	75.4	86.8	6	69
2500	11.0	12.7	4.5	2.4	2.8	114.3	131.6	7	69
3000	20.5	23.6	5.4	3.8	4.4	177.7	204.5	2	83
3500	27.3	31.4	7.2	3.8	4.4	177.4	204.1	1	87
4000	33.2	38.2	9.4	3.5	4.1	165.1	189.9	1	87
4500	39.3	45.3	11.4	3.4	4.0	161.4	185.8	1	89
5000	49.9	57.5	14.3	3.5	4.0	163.4	188.0	1	90
5500	57.7	66.4	18.2	3.2	3.6	148.4	170.7	1	93
6000	64.8	74.6	20.9	3.1	3.6	145.2	167.0	1	94

**MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED**

**BASS CAT BOATS**  
Midway, Arkansas; [basscat.com](http://basscat.com)

and starboard within easy reach for pilot and navigator.

Triangular livewells are deep for safe fish transport and to keep water from sloshing. Small triangular day-storage boxes are located just behind the livewells, with larger dry-storage compartments on each side. Easy access to pumps, screens and rigging is under twin hatches at the transom.

Bass Cat has a reputation for being first and best in innovation, and this latest STS version of the Caracal proves it.





# SKEETER

## SX241



# S

**BOATING  
BUYERS  
SPOTLIGHT**

**FIBERGLASS**

### HIGH POINTS

- ▶ 17 vertical rod holders ensure that you always have a rig at your fingertips and ready to go.
- ▶ 12-inch manual jack plate lets you adjust engine height for performance and different water depths.
- ▶ Flip-up transom bench, double-wide helm seats, and cushioned bench in front of the console allow the crew to ride in comfort underway.
- ▶ Yamaha F300 power delivers smooth performance and a quick hole shot.



**Price: \$87,630**

**SPECS:** LOA: 24'1" BEAM: 8'5" DRAFT: 1'3" DRY WEIGHT: 2,925 lb. SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 8/1,096 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 75 gal. AVAILABLE POWER: Yamaha outboard to 300 hp

The Skeeter SX241 brings decidedly more versatility to your fishing game. This trailerable, fiberglass bay boat has the draft and maneuverability to get into skinny freshwater situations, but it also has the chops to fish in salt water both inshore and outside the inlet. It's truly an anytime, any place, anywhere type of fishing platform.

For starters, this center-console is set up to be a fishing machine, with a giant bow casting platform with molded-in nonskid and a lipped gunwale to keep all your loose gear from sliding off.

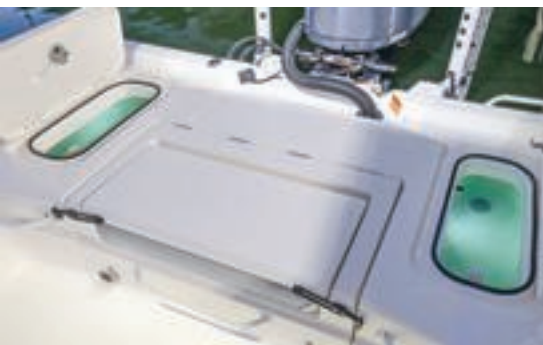
The aft casting platform does the same, and includes a flip-up backrest to provide safe and comfortable seating for your crew when you're running to the next honey hole. The SX241 comes standard with 17 vertical rod holders (22 total with the hardtop), so you can bring aboard your full quiver and always have a rod at the ready. There are lockable in-sole rod holders to keep even more of your arsenal on board and safely stowed away when the boat is on the trailer or you're tied off at the fuel dock.

For even more fishy features, the boat comes standard with a 14-gallon baitwell in the console and a 18-gallon baitwell in the transom. A 40-gallon baitwell can be added to the leaning post as an option. There also is an insulated fish box under the forward casting platform. The bow is pre-tapped to mount an optional Terrova or Ulterra Minn Kota trolling motor. Rig the helm with your choice of Garmin or Humminbird electronics.

Performance? Skeeter has matched the SX241 with Yamaha power that delivers strong performance, with a

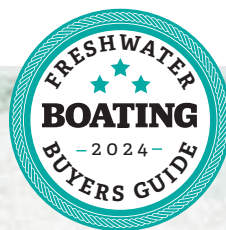
reported top speed of over 57 mph and a quick 3- to 4-second hole shot. It's a unique boat in that it can float in just over a foot of water, but its deeper V-hull with stout fiberglass construction, reverse chines and 20-degree transom deadrise help it cut through choppy and sloppy conditions in a way that most freshwater boats can't.

If you don't want to fish alone, the SX241 seats up to eight people, so you can bring a lot of friends out fishing and know that they'll enjoy the ride.



**SKEETER BOATS**  
Kilgore, Texas; skeeterboats.com

# YAMAHA FX CRUISER HO WAVERUNNER



## HIGH POINTS

- ▶ All-new 1.9 liter, 4-cylinder, four-stroke Yamaha marine engine delivers speed and acceleration.
- ▶ RecDeck, Jet-Fish packages turn this PWC into a fishing machine.
- ▶ RiDE system allows shifting from forward to neutral to reverse with just one pull of the throttle for easier, more controlled deceleration and docking.
- ▶ Standard integral speakers, 7-inch Connex touchscreen infotainment system, and a watertight glove box with USB charging.

**S**  
BOATING  
BUYERS  
SPOTLIGHT

PWC



**Price: \$16,999 (starting)**

**SPECS:** LOA: 11'8" **BEAM:** 4'2" **DRAFT:** Not much **DRY WEIGHT:** 838 lb. (without engine) **SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY:** 3/530 lb. **FUEL CAPACITY:** 18.5 gal.  
**AVAILABLE POWER:** 4-cylinder, 4-stroke 1.9 L Yamaha High Output Marine engine

**Y**amaha's FX Cruiser HO Waverunner is ready for all kinds of exciting adventure. Let's view the FX Cruiser HO through the eyes of an avid angler.

Its four-cylinder, four-stroke 1.9 liter Yamaha marine engine delivers the speed for anglers to hit multiple spots in a single day, and the power to handle currents and wind with confident control. (Standard auto bilge also adds confidence.) Plus, it's just plain fun to run.

Next, consider the FX Cruiser HO Waverunner's RiDE dual-throttle system. RiDE provides easy deceleration and

reverse using two intuitive levers. That's not only great for docking—and pulling up to the bait boat—but also makes precision-locating the FX Cruiser HO along a weed line, stump field or other structure easier. Concentrate more on lure presentation and less on boat location.

Built-in storage includes a watertight glove box, complete with USB charging and courtesy light. Combined with the cooler storage in the bow and the watertight underseat compartment, this craft boasts 44.5 gallons of storage capacity. Pack the extra gear and backup reels.

These standards aside, the addition of optional accessories transforms the FX Cruiser HO into a fishing machine. First, order the FX RecDeck (\$1,121.99). This integrates with the swim platform and reboarding ladder for a wide variety of accessory packages, including fishing. Next, add either the FX JetFish Package (\$560.99)—which includes an Engle 45 JetFish cooler, two track-mounted rod holders, two RAM cup holders, two tie-down straps, two fishing-rod retention straps and four track eyelet mounts—



**YAMAHA WAVERUNNERS**  
yamahawaverunners.com

or the FX Premium JetFish Package (\$1,346.99), which adds cooler bridle straps and the multiuse rack (\$673.99 if purchased separately). This allows mounting of a cooler, lounge seat and other accessories such as more rod holders. Two Garmin fish finder/gps/plotter options are available, including the 6-inch Garmin UHD and the 4-inch Garmin Striker.

Learn more about Yamaha's FX Cruiser HO by visiting [boatingmag.com](http://boatingmag.com), [yamahawaverunners.com](http://yamahawaverunners.com) or a Yamaha Waverunner dealer near you.





# YAR-CRAFT

## 210 TFX

### HIGH POINTS

- ▶ Full-width vacuum-formed transom ensures long life with big-water capability.
- ▶ All-fiberglass helm is large enough to flush-mount a 16-inch graph.
- ▶ Integrated net and ruler storage keep those tools handy.

### SEE THE VIDEO

To watch our video review of the Yar-Craft 210 TFX, scan this tag or visit [boatingmag.com/fwbbg24/yarcraft210tfx](http://boatingmag.com/fwbbg24/yarcraft210tfx).



**Price: \$103,665 (as tested)**

**SPECS:** LOA: 20'6" BEAM: 8'1" DRY WEIGHT: 2,120 lb. SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 6/1,125 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 50 gal. LIVEWELL CAPACITY: NA

**HOW WE TESTED:** ENGINE: Mercury 300 Pro XS FourStroke DRIVE/PROP: Outboard/Mercury Bravo One XS 15 1/2" x 22" 4-blade stainless steel GEAR RATIO: 1.75:1 FUEL LOAD: 50 gal. CREW WEIGHT: 250 lb.

Yar-Craft's 210 TFX hit all the marks for a professional walleye boat and added points for giving families a fun and comfortable cruising and water-play platform as well. The optional Mercury 300 Pro XS outboard pushed our test boat to 59 mph at 6,000 rpm spinning a 22-pitch Mercury Bravo One XS stainless-steel propeller. The TFX accelerates like a rocket ship with a 4.3-second hole shot and just 5.3 seconds to 30 mph.

For the serious up-country angler, there's a nifty trolling-motor panel that features a quick disconnect for the

troller power wires, as well as a digital voltmeter to see available battery power at a glance. A bow can house an optional flush-mounted 12-inch graph, or you can opt for one flush- and one bracket-mounted—a new necessity with the popularity of live-scan sonar.

Dry storage on the 210 is dry, thanks to new soft-edge seals that also keep the lids from chattering. The center lid houses a three-tier rod locker and easy access to the trolling motor batteries.

Behind the tempered-glass windshield is a deeper, wider cockpit than past models; that's in response to Yar-Craft fans' demand for more stomping space on deck. The helm's flush-mounted 12-inch Garmin graph is boat-and-engine integrated for at-a-glance views of boat systems and engine performance. Yar-Craft uses the same unique hexagonal rim steering wheel as Bass Cat, for better rough-water grip and control. The interior features swiveling pedestal-mounted seats, with four total seat pedestal sockets, so customizing the seating configuration is

easy. Stepping up to the bow casting platform is via a padded step over a built-in cooler.

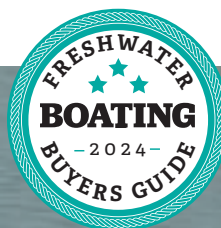
Aft, there's an access hatch in the sole to get to the cranking battery and master on/off switch. The livewell resides just behind the cockpit, flanked by dry-storage lockers, with two more storage compartments aft of that.

Ample storage, unbeatable fishing features, and attractive, durable fit-and-finish make the 210 TFX the 21-footer to beat in the coming season.

SPEED			EFFICIENCY				OPERATION		
rpm	knots	mph	gph	mpg	mpg	naut. range	stat. n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle level
1000	4.8	5.6	1.3	3.7	4.3	166.9	192.1	1	67
1500	6.3	7.2	2.3	2.7	3.1	122.4	140.9	2	72
2000	7.6	8.8	3.7	2.1	2.4	93.0	107.0	4	76
2500	9.9	11.4	4.5	2.2	2.5	99.1	114.0	5	79
3000	16.9	19.5	5.6	3.0	3.5	135.8	156.3	4	80
3500	24.7	28.5	7.5	3.3	3.8	148.3	170.7	2	83
4000	29.9	34.4	10.6	2.8	3.2	126.9	146.0	1	85
4500	36.1	41.6	13.2	2.7	3.1	123.1	141.6	1	86
5000	41.5	47.8	18.7	2.2	2.6	99.9	114.9	1	88
5500	47.0	54.1	22.0	2.1	2.5	96.2	110.7	1	91
6000	51.2	58.9	23.8	2.2	2.5	96.8	111.4	1	94

**MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED**

**YAR-CRAFT BOATS**  
Mountain Home, Arkansas; [yarcraft.com](http://yarcraft.com)



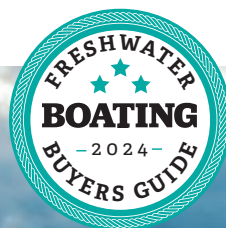
**BOATING  
CERTIFIED  
TEST  
RESULTS**

**FIBERGLASS**



# ALUMACRAFT

## COMPETITOR FSX 175 SPORT



### HIGH POINTS

- Flip-up high-back transom jump seats come with nearby grab handles, so passengers can enjoy a safe and secure ride.
- Riveted V-hull design with 2XB construction gives the Competitor FSX 175 Sport a smoother ride in lake chop and helps deaden noise and vibration on the water.
- A 13-gallon insulated built-in cooler lets you bring refreshments along for the crew.
- Ski pylon base gives this boat sporty versatility; just add the optional pylon for towing skiers and wakeboarders.

**Price: \$43,327**

**BOATING  
BUYERS  
SPOTLIGHT**

**ALUMINUM**



**SPECS:** LOA: 17'8" BEAM: 7'11" DRAFT: NA DRY WEIGHT: 1,375 lb. SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 6/1,500 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 34 gal. AVAILABLE POWER: Outboard to 150 hp

**F**ish and sport aluminum boats provide so much versatility, and the new Alumacraft Competitor FSX 175 Sport is a prime example of that, delivering a trailerable boat that you can use to fish for different species in different kinds of weather and still have a great experience.

It all starts with Alumacraft's 2XB hull: a riveted, two-plated hull that reduces sound and vibration on the water from bow to stern. Plus, its sharper bow entry helps it knife through pesky lake and river chop. Add in the fully enclosed, tall walk-through windshield that keeps

your crew protected from wind and spray, and you've got a freshwater-fishing platform for all seasons.

Alumacraft offers outboard power ranging from 90 to 150 hp from all the major engine manufacturers: Mercury, Yamaha, Honda and Suzuki. You can also add a 10 to 15 hp kicker for trolling duty, as well as a bow-mounted Minn Kota electric trolling motor.

The main cockpit can be configured with up to four pedestal seats—three come standard—and there's an additional pedestal mount on the bow and stern casting platforms. Twin transom jump seats feature high-backed flip-up backrests with grab handles mounted nearby for security underway. No matter what, there's a comfortable spot on board for up to six passengers.

As far as fishability goes, two aerated livewells come standard, each with timers so that you don't absentmindedly drain your batteries. Folding cleats help keep the deck clear of snags and potential toe-stubbers when fighting a fish. There's lockable rod storage in the bow as well as



**ALUMACRAFT BOATS**  
St. Peter, Minnesota; [alumacraft.com](http://alumacraft.com)

in the main cockpit to starboard. Both rod lockers can hold rods up to 8 feet long. The boat is pre-wired for one of the optional 12-/24-volt Minn Kota trolling motors. The Alumacraft system on the gunwales allows you to add lots of different accessories, including rod holders, cup holders and electronics.

Done fishing? Drop in the optional ski pylon, and break out the water skis. A rear deck comfort mat provides cushioning when kneeling to pull in a fish or assisting swimmers back into the boat.



PHOTOS: COURTESY ALUMACRAFT BOATS



## HIGH POINTS

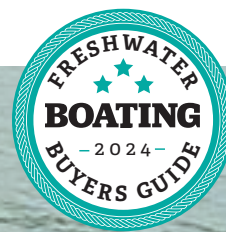
- Dual cellphone pockets serve both anglers.
- Tall wind-screens with closable center panel plus high freeboard mean a dry ride in snotty water, and a safer environment for your crew.
- Stern jump seats fold down to extend the aft casting deck.

## SEE THE VIDEO

To see our video review of the G3 Angler V178 F, scan this tag or visit [boatingmag.com/fwbbg24/g3anglerv178f](http://boatingmag.com/fwbbg24/g3anglerv178f).



# G3 BOATS ANGLER V178 F



**Price: \$46,000 (as tested)**

**SPECS:** LOA: 17'8" BEAM: 7'4" DRY WEIGHT: 1,324 lb. SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 6/802 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 19 gal. LIVEWELL CAPACITY: 27 gal.

**HOW WE TESTED:** ENGINE: Yamaha 115 hp Vmax SHO four-stroke DRIVE/PROP: Outboard/Yamaha 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 18" 3-blade stainless steel GEAR RATIO: 2.15:1 FUEL LOAD: 14 gal. CREW WEIGHT: 250 lb.

**C**  
BOATING  
CERTIFIED  
TEST  
RESULTS

ALUMINUM

**G**3's Angler series earns a Bachelor of Science in serious deepwater lake and river angling, with a minor in family fun. Rigged with Yamaha's peppy 115 Vmax SHO outboard, performance was solid; we accelerated from a dead idle to 30 mph in 7.8 seconds, and maxed out at nearly 47 mph. Fuel economy is a strong suit, for sure; at a best-cruise speed of 24.5 mph and 3,500 rpm, the SHO drank at a miserly 4.1 gallons of fuel per hour, giving a frugal 6 miles per gallon. Even at full bore, we recorded nearly 4 miles per gallon, so when conditions allow, let those

ponies have their head. With a 19-gallon tank, the Angler V178 F has a 100-mile range while leaving 10 percent in the tank for reserve.

The Angler handles tough conditions too. G3 calls the hull GX2—it's riveted 0.080-gauge aluminum reinforced with double plating in critical wear areas. The hull corners crisply and handles rough lake and wind chop well.

At the bow, the forward casting platform features small-item storage, with a spot for an optional trolling motor; ours featured a Minn Kota Terrova. Storage compartments plus a deep center rod-storage box dominate the deck forward of the cockpit. A tall walk-through windshield protects from rain and spray in cooler weather, keeping the crew comfortable and ready to fish. The pilot's console features Baystar hydraulic steering, Yamaha instruments and a standard side-mounted Yamaha control. Storage boxes in the cockpit coamings hold gear on the starboard and additional rods to port. Pilot and navigator seats are pedestal-mounted, with fore-aft adjustments and

rotating bases. The aft deck features twin jump seats that fold to extend the deck. G3 does a clean rigging job; the under-transom wiring, hoses, and cables are all well-routed and -supported.

The package price of \$46,000 includes an aluminum trailer with radial tires and a spare. Our test boat had a high-gloss deep-blue paint with custom graphics; it's available in a white or charcoal color scheme as well. The G3 V178 F is competitively priced and ready for fun and fishing.

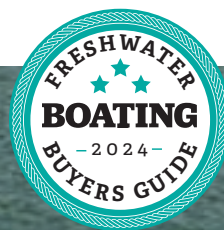
SPEED				EFFICIENCY				OPERATION		
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut.	stat.	n. mi.	s. mi.	angle	level	sound
				mpg	mpg	range	range			
1000	4.8	5.6	1.3	3.7	4.3	166.9	192.1	1	67	
1500	6.3	7.2	2.3	2.7	3.1	122.4	140.9	2	72	
2000	7.6	8.8	3.7	2.1	2.4	93.0	107.0	4	76	
2500	9.9	11.4	4.5	2.2	2.5	99.1	114.0	5	79	
3000	16.9	19.5	5.6	3.0	3.5	135.8	156.3	4	80	
3500	24.7	28.5	7.5	3.3	3.8	148.3	170.7	2	83	
4000	29.9	34.4	10.6	2.8	3.2	126.9	146.0	1	85	
4500	36.1	41.6	13.2	2.7	3.1	123.1	141.6	1	86	
5000	41.5	47.8	18.7	2.2	2.6	99.9	114.9	1	88	
5500	47.0	54.1	22.0	2.1	2.5	96.2	110.7	1	91	
6000	51.2	58.9	23.8	2.2	2.5	96.8	111.4	1	94	

**MOST ECONOMIC CRUISING SPEED**

**G3 BOATS**  
Lebanon, Missouri; [g3boats.com](http://g3boats.com)

# G3 BOATS

## SPORTSMAN 1710 PFX



### HIGH POINTS

- The 33-square-foot bow casting deck means plenty of room to play fish.
- Fit-and-finish is excellent, especially at this price point.
- Built-in three-bank battery charger (two-battery is standard) is mounted for easy access.

### SEE THE VIDEO

To see our video review of the G3 Sportsman 1710 PFX, scan this tag or visit [boatingmag.com/fwbbg24/g3sportsman1710pfx](http://boatingmag.com/fwbbg24/g3sportsman1710pfx).



**Price: \$37,995 (as tested)**

**BOATING  
CERTIFIED  
TEST  
RESULTS**

**ALUMINUM**



**SPECS:** LOA: 17'10" BEAM: 7'8" DRY WEIGHT: 1,080 lb. SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 4/650 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 21 gal. LIVEWELL CAPACITY: 19 gal. (bow); 33 gal. (stern)  
**HOW WE TESTED:** ENGINE: Yamaha F90 four-stroke DRIVE/PROP: Outboard/Yamaha 13½" x 16" 3-blade aluminum GEAR RATIO: 2.33:1 FUEL LOAD: 21 gal. CREW WEIGHT: 250 lb.

**G**3's Sportsman 1710 PFX fishes like an 18-footer and is nicely powered by Yamaha's F90 outboard. G3 promotes it as a multispecies rig, and we think that it proves to have a knack for bass, crappie and, in most Northern lakes, walleye, pike and musky. Its sleek lines and shallow draft make it ideal for treacherous rivers, and in calmer weather, we'd chase walleye and pike on the big waters. It was originally designed as a crappie and panfish boat, G3 overshot the mark; it's ready for buddy and club tournament competition as a bass hunter.

The 1710 PFX is spirited, planing in 3.9 seconds and reaching 30 mph in 6 seconds. With a top speed of just over 40 mph, it's plenty fast—especially when you'll be passing just about every fuel dock. The F90 Yamaha barely feeds itself, with best-cruise mileage of 8.6 mpg (!) at 4,000 rpm and 29 mph, consuming just 3.4 gallons per hour. At that rate, the 21-gallon tank will take at least a weekend to empty.

G3 employs an all-welded hull made from 0.100-gauge aluminum. The hull is rigid and sure-footed as a result. We tested on varying conditions, from 2-inch wind chop to rough wakeboard and ski boat wakes, and the 1710 responded affirmatively with a solid, unrattled ride. Heavy helm input delivered sharp turns with some moderate banking and a little side-slipping to make it fun. G3 offers a variety of paint and graphics packages. Ours was a crisp, high-gloss white with offsetting textured gray vinyl interior—easy to clean and keep tidy. It's also available in charcoal and midnight blue schemes. For the waterfowler, there are two mossy oak camo choices: shadow

SPEED			EFFICIENCY				OPERATION		
rpm	knots	mph	gph	mpg	naut. stat.	n. mi.	s. mi.	angle	sound level
1000	3.7	4.3	0.6	6.2	7.1	116.3	133.9	0	61
1500	5.4	6.3	1.0	5.4	6.3	102.6	118.1	2	65
2000	6.5	7.5	1.2	5.4	6.3	102.6	118.1	5	70
2500	11.0	12.7	1.9	5.8	6.7	109.8	126.3	6	74
3000	17.7	20.4	2.9	6.1	7.0	115.2	132.6	3	78
3500	21.7	25.0	3.0	7.2	8.3	136.6	157.2	2	82
4000	25.5	29.3	3.4	7.5	8.6	141.5	162.9	1	85
4500	29.0	33.4	4.6	6.3	7.3	119.1	137.0	1	88
5000	31.9	36.8	5.5	5.8	6.7	109.7	126.3	0	90
5500	35.1	40.4	7.7	4.6	5.2	86.2	99.2	0	93

**MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED**

**G3 BOATS**  
Lebanon, Missouri; [g3boats.com](http://g3boats.com)

grass and breakup.

A 19-gallon bow livewell and 33-gallon stern livewell ensure that your team catch will remain healthy on the way back to the dock. Locking dry-storage compartments feature rain-seal molded lips around the opening to keep contents dry. The console features an in-dash Humminbird Helix 5.

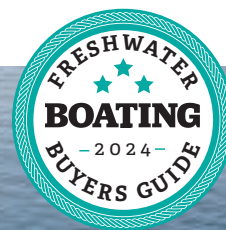
The 1710 is compact, but its wide beam offers good stability, and its trim weight on a custom trailer makes it easily trailerable with the family vehicle.





# SMOKER CRAFT

## ADVENTURER 20 GLS



S

BOATING  
BUYERS  
SPOTLIGHT

ALUMINUM

### HIGH POINTS

- ▶ Wide beam and rugged build offer confidence and room to fish with a large crew.
- ▶ Injected foam flotation provides safety and helps result in a solid feel.
- ▶ With vinyl-covered cockpit deck, this boat's got things covered.
- ▶ Wide variety of options lets you personalize your fishing and boating experience.



**Price: \$90,016 (with a 250 hp outboard and trailer)**

**SPECS:** LOA: 20'8" BEAM: 8'6" DRAFT: NA DRY WEIGHT: 2,080 lb. (approx.) SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 7/1,100 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 48 gal. AVAILABLE POWER: Outboards from 150 to 250 hp

Smoker Craft's Adventurer 20 GLS makes it easy to envision early morning at the launch, mist on the lake, and a full day on the water before you. Grab its gunnel. You'll nod once for the rugged feel and again for the Integrated Gunnel Track System. This allows mounting a wide variety of rod holders and other fishing accessories, and placing them exactly where you want them.

Now step back. Admire the hull. Smoker Craft offers the Adventurer 20 GLS in great color options. Each shines with a deep gloss, crisp lines and an

exciting pattern. This is Smoker Craft's twice-baked urethane-paint finish. Three coats of base get applied, and then the boat is baked in an oven. Next, three coats of striping go on, and the boat gets treated with heated coils. The result is a tough, long-lasting finish. And Smoker Craft's beauty is more than skin-deep.

The transom is made from 1.5-inch pressure-treated plywood sandwiched between the aluminum transom and a second aluminum sheet, and anchored using stainless-steel bolts. Run your hand along the hull. A rolled-in lapstrake makes it more rigid and less susceptible to oil-canning than other boats. Another crucial difference: Smoker Crafts utilizes a single-piece bottom. The fuel tank is integral, and the rugged keel provides directional stability plus protection from the rocks and stumps where the big fish often hide.

Stepping inside, you'll note that the decks and cockpit are covered in easy-to-clean vinyl (snap-in carpet is available, if desired). Flex your toes on the casting platforms so as to exert your weight:

The floor here is a full ¾-inch marine plywood. It is very rugged. Also note the large, fully aerated livewell in the stern. At the helm, there's a standard stereo, a tilt wheel connected to Sea Star hydraulic steering, and a rugged and protective windshield. Available options include a trolling motor, an array of electronics and a variety of canvas.

For all-weather multispecies fishing, plus occasional family outings, Smoker Craft's Adventurer 20 GLS should rank high on your list.

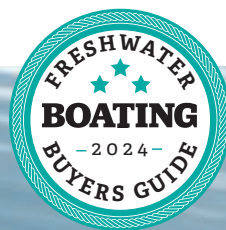


**SMOKER CRAFT**  
New Paris, Indiana; smokercraft.com

PHOTOS: COURTESY SMOKER CRAFT

# STARCRAFT

## DELTA 188 DC PRO



### HIGH POINTS

- Full walk-through windshield keeps the crew protected from the elements.
- Spacious bow casting platform is large enough for two people to fish simultaneously.
- Integrated tracking system on the gunwales allows you to add rod and cup holders, downriggers, electronics, and more.
- The Delta in the name is for the 15-inch VPS delta pad on the hull, which, like with a bass boat, helps the boat get more lift out of the hole and keep balanced and tracking at higher speeds.

**S**  
BOATING  
BUYERS  
SPOTLIGHT

ALUMINUM



**Price: \$39,984 (without engine)**

**SPECS:** LOA: 18'8" BEAM: 8'0" DRAFT: NA DRY WEIGHT: 1,792 lb. SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 7/900 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 38 gal. AVAILABLE POWER: Outboard to 175 hp

The Starcraft Delta 188 DC Pro is a multispecies aluminum fishing boat designed for the serious angler who wants to get after it in all kinds of weather. The Vertex Performance Strake hull tapers to 15 degrees at the transom, providing quick planing and strong rough-water capabilities while still allowing it to float in skinny water to get after those fish holding up in the shallow backwaters and bays.

In addition to the solid-performing aluminum hull, the bow casting platform takes advantage of the boat's 8-foot

beam to provide space for two anglers to cast and fish without getting into each other's way. There's plenty of in-sole storage up front, as well as an insulated livewell just in front of the port console.

The helm has space to mount an MFD for your electronics suite of choice. At the helm, the tilt steering allows you to adjust the wheel to your preference, all of the gauges are easy to read, and the CZone digital switches are right at hand for ease of use. A hidden slide-out drawer under the steering wheel holds up to three tackle trays.

Want to bring your entire quiver to a tournament? Between the consoles there's a lockable rod-storage locker that has fully extended rod tubs for 8-foot rods. A second lockable rod locker sits underfoot to port in the main cockpit. The aft casting deck also offers premium fishing space, with another recirculating livewell built. In addition, a plug-in cooler can be added under the port console that can serve as an additional baitwell.

Starcraft's Integrated Gunnel Track System extends from the transom all the



**STARCRAFT MARINE**  
New Paris, Indiana; [starcraftmarine.com](http://starcraftmarine.com)

way to the bow, so you can customize your accessories all around the boat. Add rod and cup holders, downriggers, additional electronics mounts, and more to the cache of gear that will help you catch more fish. And don't overlook the additional storage compartment in the rear deck, which can hold tackle trays, life jackets, tools, and other gear that you might need on the water. Overall, the Starcraft Delta 188 DC Pro is a boat designed to get you to the fish and then help you catch them.



PHOTOS COURTESY STARCRAFT MARINE



# STARWELD FLEX 19 DC PRO



S

BOATING  
BUYERS  
SPOTLIGHT

ALUMINUM

## HIGH POINTS

- ▶ All-welded, rugged 0.100-gauge marine-grade aluminum construction.
- ▶ Exclusive Torsion Beam Construction and machine-formed ribs provide great strength and a smooth ride.
- ▶ Feature-filled, including two livewells, a vinyl-covered cockpit, and lockable rod storage.
- ▶ Dedicated battery storage and seat mount on rear casting platform.



**Price: \$51,829 (with a 115 hp outboard and trailer)**

**SPECS:** LOA: 18'6" BEAM: 7'8" DRAFT: NA DRY WEIGHT: 1,403 lb. (approx.) SEAT/WEIGHT CAPACITY: 7/950 lb. FUEL CAPACITY: 40 gal. AVAILABLE POWER: Outboards from 90 to 115 hp

With a lifetime warranty on the transom and decks, plus a full six-year warranty on the vinyl or carpet, anglers should know that they are considering a quality boat before they even lay eyes on the Starweld Flex 19 DC Pro. Of course, once you see this boat in person, the quality features jump out.

For instance, there are two livewells aboard this boat: a 12-gallon stern well and another well with a whopping 25-gallon capacity in the bow. The transom splash pan inhibits water from flowing up and into the boat. Also, large

casting platforms and lockable rod storage won't go unnoticed. We also suggest taking note of the Jensen stereo, the six drink holders, the use of circuit breakers, and the No Feedback tilt-wheel steering. Chrome bezeled gauges look great, and the illuminated switches make operating the accessories easier, even if you hit the launch ramp before dawn's early light.

It might not be as easy to see, but Starweld's construction is also worthy of your attention. The hull is all-welded from 0.100-gauge marine-grade aluminum. Injected foam flotation provides security and helps deliver a solid feel when underway. The full-length reverse chine of this boat should deliver quicker planing and a drier ride. And, for those times you might want to pursue cruising or watersports instead of fish, we think that the convertibility of the optional rear bench will prove a favorite feature. Just flip it up to reveal seats, and you are ready to roll.

Other available options include canvas, varying from a full enclosure to a Bimini top to a trailerable cover. The

Starweld Flex 19 DC Pro comes with the trolling-motor plug, and, if you choose, Starweld can install a quick-disconnect 12-/24-volt trolling motor. The three-step boarding ladder is a feature that we recommend, both for swimming and watersports, as well as for providing a secure means of reboarding. You can even order a RAM-mounted Humminbird fish finder installed from the factory. For a boat with top construction and versatile features, check out the Starweld Flex Pro 19 DC Pro.



STARWELD BY STARCRAFT FISHING BOATS  
New Paris, Indiana; starcraftstarweld.com

PHOTOS: COURTESY STARWELD BY STARCRAFT FISHING BOATS



## UPGRADE YOUR SHADE

The SureShade Power Bimini automatically adjusts its position in seconds with the touch of a button. With both hardwired and rechargeable battery options, and optional accessories like the bow shade extension, the power bimini can be customized to fit your pontoon boat.

SEE THE  
POWER BIMINI  
IN ACTION



## SUN PROTECTION WITH THE PUSH OF A BUTTON

### EASY TO INSTALL



Battery-powered bimini top easily installs to your pontoon boat without the hassle of complicated wiring.

### EXTRA COVERAGE



An optional extension kit offers more shade and weather protection at the bow then zips away when you're done.

### SHADE MEETS SPEED



Enjoy sun and weather protection even at full speeds. Add ons like the Speed Top and Sport Arms allow travel up to 55 mph.





Any angler who's been fishing for more than a hot minute knows that using the correct gear is a huge part of the equation. You don't show up at the local pond to fish for crappie with a musky rod, and you don't head out for salmon on the Great Lakes with your ultralight spinning rig. No matter what you're targeting, there's a variety of rods, reels, lines and lures that you can bring with you so that you're ready for whatever conditions present themselves and whatever the fish feel like eating that day. So here, in these pages, we've highlighted some of the best gear to become available to anglers this year. Take a look at five of the best new lures available, from soft plastics to power blades to jerkbaits. There's something there for you. Then feast your eyes on some of the best rods to come out for the freshwater-fishing game, and match them with six of the latest and greatest spinning reels and baitcasters. We're not done yet. We also feature six hot new lines from which to choose, including mono, fluoro and braid. All in all, there's enough gear here to keep you happy for at least a season—until the next wave comes out and you have to find the latest and greatest to keep your edge. It's all fun, and it's all worth it. Every last lure, rod and reel brings you one step closer to that catch of a lifetime.

PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) COURTESY BERKLEY, COURTESY POWERPRO, COURTESY GARMIN, COURTESY ST. CHOIX RODS, COURTESY ABU GARCIA



### KVD DEEP JERKBAIT [1]

Legendary bass pro Kevin Van Dam and Strike King's new KVD Jerkbait both will bring fish to the boat. This lure's realistic baitfish patterns and stainless-steel hardware and nickel-plated hooks last. Unique weighting means it casts well and retrieves straight. Or twitch, crank or troll it. The 4½-inch, 3½-ounce bait is available in 12 colors. We like the pro citrus shad, \$9.99; basspro.com

### PURE FISHING CHOPPO [2]

We loved Pure Fishing's Choppo right away. Its torpedo-shaped dog-walking propeller-plopping bait is apparently irresistible. Our success ratio with the floating plug makes it beautiful, as does its stainless-steel hardware and galvanized hooks. The choice of 16 colors and four sizes—75 mm, 90 mm, 105 mm and 120 mm—makes

choosing impossible, so buy three and get one free. \$11.99; berkley-fishing.com

### GRAVEL DAWG PHANTOM CRAW [3]

Strike King and KVD in the same sentence means bad luck for bass. The new Gravel Dawg tight wobbling crankbait skips over bottom structure in 5 to 8 feet of water while luring in bass with a rapid-fire vibration that fish can see and feel. The stainless-steel hardware and sharp hooks accent the highly polished, designer bait colors that look good enough to hang on your wall.

### POWERBAIT MAXSCENT HIT WORM MAGNUM [4]

Texas-rig the 7-inch Hit Worm or fish it wacky-style, sticking a hook right in the middle. Either way, it drives bass nuts. This pro secret tactic keeps working. Add to it that Powerbait scent release

compound, and the fish might eat it faster than real food. It comes in five colors. \$8.99 for a 10-pack; tacklewarehouse.com

### BERKLEY POWER BLADE [5]

Safety-pin-style spinners became popular about a half-century ago because they could be buzzed across the surface, danced up and down through the water column, or slow-walked across the bottom. The Berkley Power Blade's hookup orientation skips over snags. Glossy painted heads and gold-and-silver-finished willow-leaf blades drive the flash and appeal of live, fleeing bait. There are nearly an unlimited number of color combinations in ⅜, ½, ¾ and 1-ounce sizes. \$9.99; tacklewarehouse.com

### POWERBAIT CREATURE HAWG [6]

Scientific laboratory tests prove that PowerBait

attracts fish. The new Creature Hawg is packed with it, and simulates crawfish and other creepy things crawling on the bottom, but it's slow to sink thanks to the fluttering "claws." It's available in 14 colors—the usual suspects. We can't wait to drop some of the brand-new Creature Hawgs in front of bass in our pond. We smell...a fish fry! (It's OK, the pond manager says they are overpopulated. What a great problem.) \$8.99 for an eight-pack; berkley-fishing.com

### RAGE HAWK [7]

Rage Hawk is only 3¼ inches long but packs a big punch. A 5/0 worm hook maximizes hookups. Cast it weightless or weighted, depending on the bass's depth and hunger. More weight enhances faster action. Less weight appeals with a slow crawl. The lure comes in a variety of colors. \$6.99 for a pack of nine; strikeking.com

PHOTOS: (IN NUMERICAL ORDER) COURTESY KVD; COURTESY PURE FISHING; COURTESY GRAVEL DAWG; COURTESY POWERBAIT; COURTESY BERKLEY; COURTESY POWERBAIT; COURTESY RAGE HAWK





### LAMIGLAS WALLEYE CLOSER [1]

Lamiglas is one of the oldest, most prestigious names in fine tackle, and its Closer series of spinning jig rods is targeted to savvy walleye anglers—and savvy walleye. The notoriously subtle bite requires the utmost in concentration and sensitivity of equipment to detect a hit. Because walleye often bite as the lure is descending, the Lamiglas Closer series is designed to help anglers feel the bite on the drop. The rods do it with high-modulus graphite that transmits the slightest vibration from the hook to the woven CFX graphite handles. Guides are extra-large to prevent icing in cold climates because, well, walleye seem to like the nastiest weather. A 5.8-foot, 6-foot and 6-foot-3-inch are best when spooled with 15-pound-test braided line for working jigs from ¼- to 1-ounce. \$279.99; lamiglas.com

### UGLY STIK G2X [2]

The Ugly Stik lives on, and bass fear the G2X series. In its founding years in the '70s, the Ugly Stik was portrayed as just that—like a brute, tough, invincible, and anglers loved them and their economical price. Its design might be retro, but its technology is proven over decades. Premium fiberglass and carbon fiber are blended, and the rod tip is the classic clear glass that can take punishment, sometimes as extreme as being stepped on or shut in doors. This legacy baitcasting rod has an EVA pistol grip shaped to balance a reel in the integrated grip seat. Guides are stainless steel, won't chip and won't rust. It's available in lengths from 5 feet, 6 inches to 7 feet in actions from medium-light to heavy. At this writing, a ladies-model G2X spinning line is available in several actions and at bargain prices from \$24.95. \$49.95; purefishing.com/gx2

### ST. CROIX MOJO TRIGON RODS [3]

Made in the USA is the first thing we like about St. Croix rods. A reputation for quality, strength, balance and sensitivity are four more attributes we admire. St. Croix built the Trigon series with layers of SCIII carbon fiber and SCVI exotic carbon fiber. The SCIII balances strength and weight, while the higher-modulus SCVI carbon fiber adds fast action and sensitivity, traits usually found only in more-expensive rods. Split-cork and EVA grips provide an angler connection with light taps transmitted through the tip. Guides with stainless-steel frames and tough, slippery aluminum-oxide inserts resist line wear. Models are available in 6 foot-6-inch to 8-foot-3-inch casting rods and 6-foot-8-inch to 7-foot-10-inch spinning rods. \$170 to \$190 (spinning); \$175 to \$279 (casting); stcroixrods.com

### KASTKING ASSEGAJ BASS RODS [4]

Kastking nailed it with the Assegai series of technique-focused rods. They are sleek, beautiful in appearance, and more lethal in application. Choose a model for jerkbaits with the ideal tip action to make it dance. Models for cranking, spinning, finessing and more will help you choose the exact rod for the application. These rods have six layers of graphite for ultimate sensitivity and hook-setting backbone. A white finish integrates nicely with tangle-free K-frame guides that minimize friction as mono or braid passes through. Split grips let anglers keep their hands on the pulse of the line, detecting the softest strikes. Twelve casting styles and three spinning models cover every pro tactic on the water, from jigs, jerkbaits and crankbaits to pitching and finessing the lightest lures. \$159.99; kastking.com

## PENN WRATH II 4000

Designed for 8- to 12-pound-test monofilament or 15- to 30-pound-test braid, the Penn Wrath II 4000 is an affordable midsize spinning reel that can be used in a number of freshwater applications. The entire Wrath II lineup ranges from size 2500 to 8000, with the largest, 8000, going for \$69.99. The corrosion-resistant graphite body keeps it durable yet lightweight, and the anodized-aluminum spool resists corrosion. \$49.99; pennfishing.com



## ABU GARCIA ZENON LTX BFS LOW-PROFILE REEL

Just hitting the market this October, the Zenon LTX BFS is Abu Garcia's lightest and most compact baitcaster to date.

This lightweight reel is designed for precision casting, flipping and pitching control to allow top-level anglers to place their lure or bait in exactly the right spot. Its Carbon Matrix drag system is super-smooth throughout its setting range, allowing the angler to pressure the fish without creating herky-jerky stops and starts.

\$549.99; abugarcia.com



## ST. CROIX SEVIN GF SERIES

St. Croix has been in the business over 70 years, and is known mainly for fishing rods. But it also offers reels engineered to optimize performance with its rods. The new Sevin GF baitcaster features a one-piece graphite frame and side covers, 11 stainless-steel ball bearings, and a 32 mm forged-aluminum spool that will hold 110 yards of 12-pound-test mono. A carbon-fiber handle, a multistack carbon-fiber and stainless-steel drag system, microadjustable magnetic cast control, a precision-hobbed hard brass pinion and a drive gear make sure it's the finisher for bass.

\$120; stcroixrods.com

PHOTOS: (COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP) COURTESY PENN. COURTESY ST. CROIX, COURTESY ABU GARCIA





### SHIMANO STRADIC FM 1000

The Stradic FM is designed to provide dependability and versatility at a reasonable price. The 1000 is the smallest in the lineup that goes all the way up to a 5000. This series of reels won an innovation award at the 2023 ICAST show. The 1000 has a 6.0-to-1 gear ratio, and can hold 2- to 6-pound-test mono line or 10- to 20-pound-test braid. Shimano's X-Protect coating helps the reel shed water and protects it from corrosion. \$199.99; fish.shimano.com

### ST. CROIX SEVIN GS SERIES

Spinning is so popular that St. Croix worked simultaneously with the baitcast team to bring this beauty to market. It's available in five sizes, from 750 to 3000, to go ultralight or heavy on big bass. Its carbon-fiber frame and side plates are rigid, light and corrosion-resistant. With 11 stainless-steel ball bearings, a machined-aluminum handle and titanium bail, it's built to last. Its carbon fiber and stainless-steel drag give smooth control for battling lunker fish during a prolonged fight. A helical brass pinion gear adds power. \$120; stcroixrods.com



### OKUMA ITX CB 3000 SPINNING REEL

Designed specifically for freshwater and light inshore applications, the ITX CB 3000 sports a 6.0-to-1 gear ratio, and its lightweight construction ensures a durable-yet-precise, strike-sensitive reel. The carbonite drag washer system guarantees a smooth drag experience as you battle the hardest freshwater fish. It's designed to sweep water away from the anodized-aluminum spool with its Cyclonic Flow Rotator Technology, protecting the reel from corrosion. The reel also comes in 1000, 2500 and 4000 versions. \$159.99; okumafishingusa.com



PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) COURTESY SHIMANO, COURTESY ST. CROIX, COURTESY OKUMA

## POWERPRO SUPER8SLICK V2

Reengineered for a maximum angling toughness, Super8Slick V2 combines a new eight-end, dense-weave construction with the proven Enhanced Body Technology coating process. S8SV2 delivers all of the smooth and silent benefits of original Super8Slick, plus added abrasion toughness to rip through the heaviest of cover with the same force as traditional four-end braids. S8SV2 is available in blue, moss green and hi-vis aqua green, as well as onyx for those anglers pursuing monster bass and other predators. Available in 10- to 80-pound-test (0.15 to 0.43 mm); \$19.99 to \$48.99 per 125-yard spool.



## BERKLEY TRILENE 100% FLUOROCARBON

Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon is the "XT" (a line known by squadrons of anglers for decades) of professional-grade fluorocarbon fishing lines. Its formula provides incredible knot strength, abrasion resistance and shock strength. It sinks fast, with greater line density for high sensitivity and less "bow"—all of which help add up to a better feel for the bite, easier hook-sets, and more fish landed. Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon is low-memory and nearly invisible. It comes in 4- to 25-pound-test; prices range between \$11.99 and \$27.99.



## DAIWA J FLUORO SAMURAI

Also available as leader, Daiwa J Fluoro Samurai is a made-in-Japan fluorocarbon main line intended for anglers seeking to mask presentations to wary gamefish. It is of very fine diameter for any given pound-test, and its stretch and stiffness levels vary across the range of ratings. All pound-tests of Daiwa J Fluoro Samurai fishing line are wound on ergonomic spools with convenient filler-enabled spool protectors with a D-VEC halfway sticker located at 110 yards to inform the user of available line. Available in 2- to 25-pound-test (0.138 mm to 0.426 mm), and prices range from \$23.99 to \$44.99 for 220-yard spools (1,000-yard spools are available).

PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) COURTESY POWERPRO, COURTESY DAIWA, COURTESY BERKLEY



## AFTCO SAIKO PRO LEADER

Several anglers who we know and trust swear by 12- and 15-pound AFTCO Saiko Pro fluorocarbon leader for bass fishing.

Saiko Pro is a leader material that is 100 percent custom fluorocarbon and made in Japan. AFTCO Saiko Pro offers anglers superior strength and abrasion resistance. In fact, the maker claims that it is stronger after becoming abraded than its leading competitors—up to 20 percent more, actually.

Naturally, Saiko Pro offers the low visibility for which fluorocarbon is renowned.

Additionally, the AFTCO SecureSpool keeps leaders neat and organized. Saiko Pro is available in clear and pink. While sizes up to 300 pounds are available, freshwater anglers will seek lighter line-test ratings. Check out the range of sizes between 12 and 80 pounds (0.281 mm and 0.810 mm); \$13 to \$38 for a 25-yard spool.

## SHIMANO MASTIFF

Casting, twitching and jerking large lures can really put fluorocarbon line to the test. Shimano's new Mastiff fluoro stays tough to keep you fishing using what the company calls Nanoarmor.

Nanoarmor is engineered with nano-size ridges across the outer surface of the line. These ridges enhance knot strength and toughness, preventing slippage while also reducing the chances of line breakage. These factors are essential for reliability and confidence, especially when working big lures.

Produced in Japan with strict quality control, Shimano Mastiff FC is 100 percent fluorocarbon line that offers anglers consistency and reliability with strength, durability, and smoothness to enhance performance. It is available from 4-pound/0.17 mm to 20-pound/0.37 mm in 200-yard spools; \$22.99 to \$30.99.



## SUFIX SUNRISE BRAID

Small-diameter braid makes for long casts, excellent strike detection and positive hook-sets. But it can be hard to see sometimes. Sufix shines with a new color for its 832 Advanced Superline: sunrise braid. Now add seeing strikes

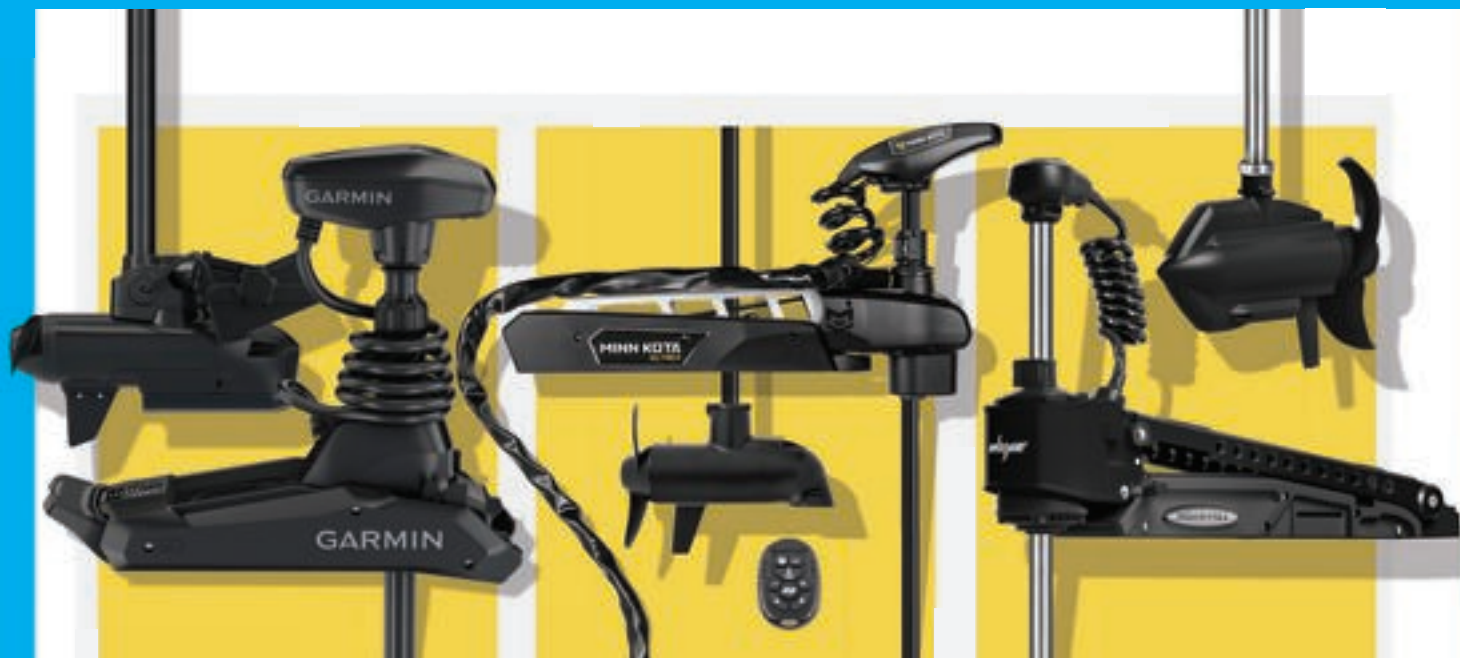
better to the list of attributes.

This new color joins an array of other colors that allow anglers to customize their presentations for both freshwater and saltwater species. The 832 also is available in camo, coastal camo, ghost,

high-vis yellow, low-vis green and lime green.

Sufix sunrise braid is available in all spool sizes: 150 yards, 300 yards, 600 yards, 1,200 yards and 3,500 yards in 6- to 80-pound-test; \$19.99 for a 150-yard spool; [rapala.com/us\\_en/sufix](http://rapala.com/us_en/sufix).





## GARMIN FORCE KRAKEN

The new Garmin Force Kraken with an easy-to-deploy manual pivot mount joins the original Force series with a scissor mount. Featuring a brushless electric motor designed for both fresh and salt water, Kraken operates at either 24 volts (80 pounds of thrust) or 36 volts (100 pounds of thrust). It's up to 37 percent more efficient than brush motors. An improved anchor-lock decelerates the motor when it's within a meter of the desired location using reverse prop spin. A floating, wireless remote features a gesture-sensitive point-and-go technology that's like using a Wii. A foot pedal (wireless or hard-wired) can also be added. Other control options include the ability to connect the motor wirelessly to a compatible Garmin chart plotter or a Garmin quatix smartwatch. Integration with Garmin LiveScope live-sonar transducers is made easy by running the transducer cable within the trolling-motor shaft. The LiveScope transducer and mounting bracket are required to do this. Force Kraken is available in 63-, 75- and 90-inch shaft lengths in the white paint scheme, but only 63- and 75-inch shafts in the black version. Retail pricing starts at \$3,699; [garmin.com](http://garmin.com).

## MINN KOTA QUEST

Minn Kota will have new brushless, bow-mounted electric trolling motors for the 2024 season. Of keen interest to freshwater anglers will be the new Ultrix Quest featuring a scissor mount, as well as Ulterra Quest and Terrova Quest with pivot mounts, with Ulterra featuring a redesigned automatic stow and deploy. Each Quest series motor will operate on dual voltage, either 24 volts (90 pounds of thrust) or 36 volts (115 pounds of thrust). The new motors will incorporate real-time battery monitoring with a "time until empty" indicator, prompting anglers to switch to Eco mode when the battery reserves drop to 20 percent, to extend fishing time. Built-in GPS technology will enable functionality such as Spot-Lock, as well as a new Drift mode that works like a virtual drift sock to slow the boat's drift and keep presentations in the strike zone longer. Shaft lengths range from 45 to 72 inches. Control options will include a new, advanced GPS wireless remote to drive the motor from anywhere in the boat, and all are easily networked with a Humminbird multifunction display. Prices range from \$3,199.99 to \$4,499.99; [minnkota.johnsonoutdoors.com](http://minnkota.johnsonoutdoors.com).

## POWER-POLE MOVE

Power-Pole has introduced two new lines of bow-mounted electric trolling motors with brushless electric motors: the PV series with a pivot mount and the ZR series with a scissor mount, both built for fresh or salt water. A titanium shaft carries a lifetime guarantee. Built-in GPS with features such as Anchor mode—which automatically maintains boat position—and Active Vector Heading are akin to autopilot. Wireless control choices include the ReelFeel foot pedal that provides the sensation of cable steering. A wireless hybrid remote will control both the Move trolling motor and Power-Pole shallow-water anchors. Boating anglers can network the Move with a Lowrance or Simrad touchscreen multifunction display. In addition, the underside of the Move motor housing on the ZR series also has an option for a built-in plug-and-play HDI sonar transducer to display on a Lowrance MFD. The motors work with both 24- and 36-volt battery configurations. The PV series is available in 45-, 52-, 60- and 72-inch shaft lengths, while the ZR motors come in 45-, 52- and 60-inch versions. Retail pricing starts at \$4,999.99; [power-pole.com](http://power-pole.com).

PHOTOS: COURTESY GARMIN, COURTESY MINN KOTA, COURTESY POWER-POLE





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# BOATING<sup>®</sup>

# Bright Lights, Big Slabs

## 5 GREAT AMERICAN CITIES WHERE YOU CAN GO BASS FISHING

BY PETE MCDONALD

The last time I visited Detroit, I got an up-close look at the iconic GM Renaissance Center—the tall collection of glass skyscrapers that dominates the downtown skyline. The towers gave off a beautiful shimmer as the sun's rays reflected off the glass structure while they passed over Windsor, Canada, behind us. Among other things, the Renaissance Center houses some businesses, including General Motors, a Marriott hotel and a couple of fancy restaurants. But I wasn't there to visit any of those, or take in a Tigers game at nearby Comerica Park, or dive into the city's rich music history, from Motown to Eminem. I was there to fish.

I connected with a local fishing guide named Joe Bauer, and at sunrise, we set out from nearby St. Clair Shores aboard his 2022 Nitro ZV21 multispecies fishing boat. We had fished our way down along Lake St. Clair, catching smallmouth bass, sheepshead and walleye along the way. Suddenly, there we were, drifting along in the Detroit River as it swept us past the unmistakable view of downtown Detroit. And we were hooked up to smallmouth bass.

It's the perception among many that bass fishing is a rural pursuit. Yet, here I was, experiencing smallmouth madness right in the heart of the Motor City. Bauer, who has been guiding in the area for seven years, knew where to go to work our soft-plastic baits and generate hookup after hookup, all within reach of the beating heart of one of America's most well-known cities.

Detroit is not the only major city in America where you can catch largemouth and smallmouth bass. Here, along with Detroit, are five places where you can hook up within city limits.



## DETROIT

The Detroit River is unique in that it's really a 28-mile-long strait that connects Lake St. Clair with Lake Erie. It also dissects the United States and Canada, with Detroit residing on its western bank and Windsor, Ontario, occupying the eastern side, so you have to be careful not to enter international waters as you transit.

Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie are known for producing trophy-size

smallmouth bass, so it only makes sense that these fish live in the Detroit River too. The fishing is a little different because the bass in Lake St. Clair tend to gravitate toward grassbeds; in Lake Erie, they hang around rocky structure. The Detroit River runs swift, so the bass hold deeper.

While smallmouths can be caught almost year-round in the river, Bauer finds that the best time to fish for them there is late summer

PHOTO: POLOSKA25 / ADOBE STOCK





"THE BASS GO TO THE RIVER AND GET BEHIND BOULDERS OUT OF CURRENT, AND THE NATURAL FLOW BRINGS CRAWFISH, GOBIES AND MINNOWS TO THEM, SO THEY DON'T HAVE TO GO HUNT."

PHOTO: KEN HANNA

because the fish seek out the deeper, more oxygenated water in the river. You want to use weighted rigs to get your bait or lures down deeper if you're in a drift pattern.

But there are 31 islands in the Detroit River, starting with Belle Isle on the American side, and running downriver to Grosse Ile and then Celeron Island as the river flows into Lake Erie. There's plenty of structure.

"The bass go to the river and get behind boulders out of current, and the natural flow brings crawfish, gobies and minnows to them, so they don't have to go hunt," Bauer says.

The fishing season starts in late April and runs all the way through Thanksgiving. If you're hearty enough to fish in a snowmobile suit, you can catch smallies in the snow and then head to Ford Field to watch the Lions game.



# PITTSBURGH

There's a reason the Pittsburgh Steelers used to play their home games at a place called Three Rivers Stadium. In the heart of downtown Pittsburgh, the Allegheny and the Monongahela rivers converge to form the Ohio River, pumping a lot of fresh water through the Steel City. While the city is more known for its six-time Super Bowl champions, famous bass professional Kevin Van Dam did win the Bassmaster Classic when Pittsburgh hosted it back in 2005.

While once severely polluted by industrial waste, the water quality of the rivers as they flow through Pittsburgh has improved dramatically over the past 30 years or so, leading to an excellent fishery for mostly small-mouth bass, with a few largemouths thrown into the mix. Many say that the Allegheny River is the cleanest of the three and offers the best fishing.

There are several public boat ramps within the city limits that put you right in the heart of urban bassing opportunities, including the Sharpsburg ramp directly across the river from the Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium.

There is a ton of man-made structure throughout the city's waterways that hold fish on the Monongahela and the Allegheny, and where they converge at Point State Park. You can then follow the Ohio River downstream for great fishing opportunities around Neville Island and the Emsworth Lock and Dam. Fish here, and maybe you don't have to wear black and gold to hoist a trophy.

**THERE ARE SEVERAL PUBLIC BOAT RAMPS WITHIN THE CITY LIMITS THAT PUT YOU RIGHT IN THE HEART OF URBAN BASSING OPPORTUNITIES, INCLUDING THE SHARPSBURG RAMP DIRECTLY ACROSS THE RIVER FROM THE PITTSBURGH ZOO AND AQUARIUM.**

PHOTOS: GEORGE / ADOBE STOCK, COLBY / ADOBE STOCK (INSET)





BESIDES THE EASY ACCESS TO BASS-LADEN FRESH WATER, THE MAJOR APPEAL OF FISHING IN ORLANDO—AND ALL THROUGHOUT FLORIDA—IS THE POTENTIAL FOR CATCHING THE BIGGEST BASS OF YOUR LIFE.

## ORLANDO

Shingle Creek, the headwaters of the Florida Everglades, runs through downtown Orlando. It flows down toward Lake Okeechobee, the largemouth bass capital of the world, but largemouths seemingly swim in even the smallest puddle in the state of Florida. Orlando harbors 60,000 acres of fresh water within its city limits, so there are plenty of bucket-mouths available to be caught. (You can even catch trophy-size fish in nearby Disney World, if you hire an official Disney charter to take you.)

Besides the easy access to bass-laden fresh water, the major appeal of fishing in Orlando—and all throughout Florida—is the potential for catching the biggest bass of your life.

“On any given cast, you can hook up with a 14-pounder,” says Zak Fadden, a fishing guide based in the Orlando area.

The state has its own kind of bass, known as the Florida strain, which grows about a pound per year. The reason? Because the water rarely falls below 58 degrees, the bass are always feeding.

Orlando is a sprawling city, so you won’t get the sweeping views



of skyscrapers in the background as you hook into bass, but there are plenty of public boat ramps within the city limits. There are also plenty of lakes in the surrounding areas, such as the Butler Chain of Lakes, the Clermont Chain of Lakes, John’s Lake, Lake Apopka and Lake Tohopekalliga, known by the locals as “Toho.”

Fadden, who’s been a full-time guide in Orlando for six years, grew up fishing in Detroit and has competed in tournaments all around the country. But he says that Florida is the best. “You can fish here 12 months a year,” he says.



# CHICAGO

Like Detroit, Chicago is known more for a lot of things other than fish—think blues music, deep-dish pizza, Da Bears, Da Bulls, Da Cubs and even Da Sox. In terms of fishing, it's known more for salmon out on Lake Michigan or its famous smelt run. Still, the Windy City also offers the chance to catch smallmouth bass right in the heart of downtown. In fact, an angler caught the Illinois state record smallmouth bass, weighing in at 7 pounds, 3 ounces, in Chicago's Monroe Harbor in 2019.

Southern Lake Michigan is a smallmouth hotspot, and the bass hold up well in the waters around urban Chicago, lurking around man-made structure and rocky riprap that keep the city protected from the lake's erosion-causing waves.

"From Navy Pier all the way 40 miles south, the shoreline is all structure," says Ralph Steiger, a fishing guide based on the Indiana-Illinois border who has guided on the southern tip of Lake Michigan for 19 years. "That whole area is full of fish."

The smallmouth bass are getting bigger and more abundant, thanks to a

strict catch-and-release ethic among local anglers, as well as the rise of the invasive goby baitfish population, which are like candy to smallmouth bass. But it's not just the lake that holds good fishing.

"You'd be shocked at the water quality in the Chicago River," Steiger says. "It's getting better and better."

He says that the river has a decent largemouth bass population, and you can catch smallmouth bass in the mouth of the river where it empties into Lake Michigan. Steiger adds, "We're finding fish in places you'd never think to cast."




PHOTOS: SPIROVIEW INC. / ADOBE STOCK, COURTESY RALPH STEIGER (INSET)

"YOU'D BE  
SHOCKED AT  
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QUALITY IN THE  
CHICAGO RIVER.  
IT'S GETTING  
BETTER AND  
BETTER."








MANY OF CALIFORNIA'S LAKES AND RIVERS HAVE EXCELLENT FORAGE FOR BASS, AS WELL AS AN EXTENDED GROWING SEASON DUE TO THE MODERATE CLIMATE.

PHOTOS: MARCUS / ADOBE STOCK, KWANZA / ADOBE STOCK (INSET)

## SACRAMENTO

The California Delta, where the Sacramento and the San Joaquin rivers converge in a labyrinth of islands and backwaters, is considered one of the premier areas in the country to catch largemouth bass. The heart of the best Delta fishing is about an hour's drive from downtown Sacramento, but that doesn't mean there aren't fish to be had in the heart of the city.

The American River flows from the Sierra Nevada mountains into downtown Sacramento, where it converges with the Sacramento River just past the Jibboom Street Bridge and Tiscornia Park. One of the best places to catch urban bass is in Washington Lake, which juts off from the Sacramento Deep Water Ship Channel in the western section of Sacramento.



Several of the biggest largemouth bass ever caught have come from California, ever since the state introduced Florida-strain large-mouths to some of its waters in the 1950s. As with Florida, many of California's lakes and rivers have excellent forage for bass, as well as an extended growing season due to the moderate climate. While you might not catch a world record in the Delta area, you may very well hook up with a 15-pounder, even within Sacramento city limits.



# a place in the sun

## SEVEN WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE SUN WHILE YOU'RE ON THE WATER

BY PETE McDONALD

Quick—when you think of boating safety, what's the first thing that comes to mind? Odds are, it's a flare gun or a fire extinguisher or a life jacket or even a VHF radio. Sun protection is probably not at the top of the list, but it should be. We usually think of boating safety in terms of immediate danger: waves, storms, man overboard. But in the long term, those bluebird days can hurt you if you're not careful. The American Academy of Dermatology states that 1 in 5 people will develop skin cancer in their lifetime, and approximately 9,500 people in America get diagnosed every day. The good thing is, it's easy to protect yourself, and most of us do it already as part of our boating routine. If you don't, you should. Here are seven products to help you protect yourself from the sun's rays.





PHOTO: COURTESY COLUMBIA SPORTSWEAR

## BUFF COOLNET UV NECKWEAR

The original face protector has become so ubiquitous that people refer to any brand as a Buff the way everyone calls tissues Kleenex. The CoolNet UV Neckwear comes in several styles and has UPF 50 protection. Each one is multipurpose and can cover your neck or entire face. The fabric is breathable, so you can pull it over your mouth and nose. I wear them whether it's hot or cold because they also offer wind protection. When Buff neckwear first came out, everyone looked like pirates. But now they are used so widely that nobody bats an eye when a boatful of masked crewmembers speeds by. \$24; buff.com



## COSTA MAINSAILS

Sunglasses are another essential but sometimes overlooked tool for sun protection. Look for shades with high-quality lenses that can filter out harmful UV rays. Costa offers several types of polarized lenses, including its 580 lenses, which absorb 100 percent of UV rays and filter out harsh yellow light at 580 nm. Sunglasses also keep your eyes protected from rays that bounce off the water or your boat's fiberglass deck, helping reduce the effects that cause pterygium, aka surfer's eye, a condition that causes your eyes to yellow from extended exposure to the sun and wind.

Costa's new Mainsail frames are designed with micro side shields and hooding to keep out excess light. Costa's Hydrolite grips on the temples help them stay in place. Eye-wire drains and channels keep sweat off your face. Starting at \$182; costadelmar.com



PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) COURTESY BUFF; COURTESY COSTA (2)





## HUK WAYPOINT HOODIE

If you ever happen to see us on the water testing boats, there's a good chance that one of our editors will be wearing a Huk Waypoint hoodie adorned with the *Boating* logo. That's because the Waypoint hoodie offers excellent sun protection on hot days as well as cooler ones. The Waypoint hoodie feels like soft, breathable cotton, but it's actually made from recycled plastic bottles. It has a UPF 50 rating, and the hoodie top will keep your dome and neck protected on blistering days. The shirt features cooling fibers and antimicrobial properties, so you won't smell after working up a sweat on the water. The front pocket is a handy place to slip your sunglasses or cellphone. \$55; [hukgear.com](https://hukgear.com)



## SPF vs. UPF

When dealing with sun protection, you'll see two different letter combinations on the products. Sunscreen and other lotions come with an SPF rating, while most articles of clothing are designated with a UPF rating. What's the difference?

**UPF** stands for ultraviolet protection factor and rates the amount of harmful UVA and UVB rays that a fabric allows to reach your skin. For instance, a shirt with a UPF 50 rating blocks 98 percent of harmful rays and allows 2 percent, or  $\frac{1}{50}$ , to reach your skin. The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends clothes with a UPF rating of 30 or higher, with 50 being the best.

**SPF**, which stands for sun protection factor, is a time-based rating for how long wearing it will keep your skin from getting burned compared with not wearing any sunscreen at all. So, a sunscreen with an SPF 15 rating will keep you from getting burned 15 times longer than if you went outside without wearing it.





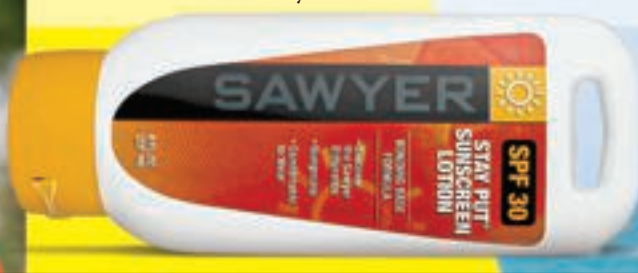
## COLUMBIA TERMINAL TACKLE PANTS

Who thinks of pants when they think of sun protection? I do, especially if they're lightweight and breathable like Columbia's Terminal Tackle pants. Because they're part of Columbia's PFG line designed for fishing, the pants have Omni-Shade, which gives them a UPF 50 rating. As a bonus, they have Columbia's Omni-Shield protection, which helps repel biting insects. Made mostly of polyester, they dry quickly, clean easily, and stand up to rugged use. They come in four different colors and have six pockets, including a zipper pocket that's great for stowing your cellphone or car keys so that they don't fall overboard. Columbia's entire PFG lineup offers great sun protection in everything from shirts to hats to hoodies, but I chose the pants because I wear them on the water. \$60; [columbia.com](http://columbia.com)



## SAWYER STAY-PUT SPF 30

Sunscreen is probably the most important tool in sun protection and should be used to protect all exposed skin areas. The one issue that people have with sunscreen, especially those who go in and out of the water or engage in activities where they might perspire, is forgetting to reapply. First developed for US troops serving during Desert Storm, Sawyer Stay-Put SPF 30 was engineered to solve that problem because it absorbs deeper into the skin and lasts longer than most other sunscreens on the market. Sawyer calls it the Breathable Matrix Formula, and it allows your body to sweat without washing away the sun-blocking properties. \$13.99 for an 8-ounce bottle; [sawyer.com](http://sawyer.com)



PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) COURTESY COLUMBIA SPORTSWEAR (2), COURTESY SAWYER (2)





## ORVIS SUNGLOVES

If there's one place people forget to cover with sunscreen, it's the back of their hands. Yet your hands are probably the most likely to be exposed to the sun for long periods while out on the water. Gloves such as Orvis' Sungloves can solve this problem by protecting the backs of your hands while keeping fingers free to work the electronics, tie knots and steer the boat. Made for fly-fishing, the Sungloves also work for general boaters wanting more sun protection for their hands. Made of Spandex and synthetic leather, the lightweight gray gloves can get fully wet and still dry quickly while you wear them. The UPF 50 gloves come in four sizes. \$29.95; [orvis.com](https://orvis.com)

## SIMMS CUTBANK SUN HAT

While the traditional baseball hat is still the go-to option for men and women alike, a wide-brimmed sun hat offers more protection from the elements while still being breathable. The Simms Cutbank sun hat is a straw beach hat that works well on a boat too. Made of 100 percent palm leaf, the straw construction makes it cool and breathable. It has an elastic sweatband and a Stampede strap to hold it in place. Plus, it's collapsible, so it can smush down for travel and pop back into shape. The wide brim protects your face, neck and shoulders. It's like walking around with your own personal shade tree. It's even machine-washable should it get dirty. \$59.95; [simmsfishing.com](https://simmsfishing.com)



PHOTOS: (FROM TOP) COURTESY ORVIS, COURTESY SIMMS



# FUNDING





# YOUR FUN

## FOUR DIFFERENT TYPES OF BOAT BUYERS ILLUSTRATE HOW TO FINANCE YOUR NEW BOAT

BY RON BALLANTI ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM BOWER

**S**o, you're going to do it: Take the plunge and buy the new boat of your dreams. You've cruised boat shows, visited dealerships, and scoured the internet to find the perfect rig for your lifestyle and budget. After having countless conversations, scanning boat tests and brochures to compare specifications, and poking around in lockers and peeking into cabins, you've found "it"—the best boat for you and your family.

Now you need to answer a question that is equally important, particularly in these challenging economic conditions: What is the best way to pay for it?

Finding the right answer to this question could be even more challenging in today's environment of rising inflation and interest rates, not to mention the added wrinkle that many eager wannabe boaters are sitting on lengthy waitlists for boats to be built and delivered.

Still, the main financing channels are fairly common, albeit with a few twists. Most boats are financed in one of three ways: financing arranged through a boat dealer or manufacturer, a home-equity loan or line of credit arranged through a bank or credit union, or a specifically designed consumer boat loan arranged with a bank, credit union or other lender that specializes in marine financing.

We've spoken with some experts in the field of marine lending to get the latest intel on popular financing options. We've also identified four different types of boat-buying personalities most likely to take advantage of these channels to finance their future fun. You just might see a little bit of yourself in one (or more) of these characters.

### DEALER DAN

**I**f it's not broke, why fix it?" is this guy's motto. A traditionalist to the end, he's eager to sit down with the boat dealer and hash out a financing plan for that new boat he's been lusting for. Why not? It's still a tried-and-true option for a wide variety of boat shoppers.

Boat dealers have access to their own financing partners, as well as those from the various boat and motor manufacturers that they represent. They work with boat loans every day and are well-versed in the nuances of getting the deal done quickly and easily. Of course, they have a profit motive in getting the deal done through them. They are also motivated to find a financing structure that works with your credit score, boat-buying budget and available down payment. They want a customer who will be satisfied over the long run and rely on the dealer for years of service, accessories, and lifestyle purchases. Their motivation to seal the deal and the available funding resources and daily experience they have with boat loans can make them the best option for many boat shoppers.

For example, a recently announced partnership

between Sportsman Boats and Yamaha Financial Services illustrates the advantages of this option. "We're the only independent boat brand to offer captive financing through Yamaha Financial Services," says Victor Gonzalez, Sportsman Boats' director of marketing. "This means our dealers have many retail financing options at their disposal to help customers find a way into the right boat for them."

According to Gonzalez, this also gives Sportsman the ability to develop and promote programs such as delayed payments or "buying down" interest rates if needed to help dealers move boats. This might not be a critical need in today's market where, as Gonzalez reports, 80 to 90 percent of Sportsman boats leave the factory floor pre-sold. Still, these conditions aren't going to last forever, and forward-thinking builders such as Sportsman want to give their dealers ways to keep the sales momentum going in the future.

**BOTTOM LINE:** The boat dealer is motivated to find a financing plan that works for you, but their options might be limited.



## TOMMY TRUST FUND

**O**K, this guy doesn't really have to worry about financing his boat purchases. Being born into generational wealth means he can pull money out of his bank account anytime to buy his dream boat—you know, the one most people only fantasize about.

But just because he has the financial wherewithal to plunk down a briefcase

of Benjamins for a new boat, is it always the smart idea? That depends, according to John Haymond, senior vice president for Medallion Bank and president of the National Marine Lenders Association. "It really depends on your individual financial situation and the specifics of your boat purchase," Haymond says. "It's never a bad idea to maintain cash in reserve, especially

in volatile economic conditions. It could also be wise to put less money down or stretch out payments in the structuring of your financing, particularly as investment rates move higher."

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** Yes, cash is king, but sometimes financing is to the buyer's benefit, even if it's not necessary.

### BOAT-LOAN BASICS

Even with today's tumultuous economic conditions, there are some general assumptions you can hold regarding boat financing. For example, interest rates offered by lenders will be lower as the amount of the loan goes up, generally. Similarly, shorter loan terms (the length of time required to pay it back) will generally provide lower interest rates. Higher

loan amounts can typically be stretched over longer periods of time. Depending on the amount financed, boat-loan terms can range from four to 20 years. The down payment you make (typically 10 to 20 percent) as well as your income and credit score can affect the overall parameters of the financing package.



# HOME-EQUITY HANK

**T**he majority of us don't have limitless funds. Many people, however, do have access to a considerable amount of money through the equity in their homes. This money can be tapped by refinancing a cash-out mortgage, taking a second mortgage, or setting up a home-equity loan or credit line.

There can be advantages to this route, beginning with the fact that interest rates on these loans often are lower than nonsecured consumer loans. Depending on the specifics of your situation, there could also be tax advantages for the interest paid on the loan. Home-equity loans can also be structured in a variety of ways,

including some long-term options that allow you to stretch out repayment.

Depending on your situation, taking money out of your house could put you in the category of a cash buyer. Not exactly like Mr. Trust Fund, because you still have a loan to repay, but it gives you options to pay all at once, or pay a large down payment and the rest over time on a traditional boat loan. And approaching a dealer with cash makes your negotiating position stronger.

There are risks to going this route. Your credit availability is subject to personal economic conditions and your regional real estate market. Generally, it's also a more complex process because the lender will

need to examine your income and your home's market value and loan-to-value ratio. You might need to get a home appraisal done as well. Depending on the bank or lender, there can be closing costs attached.

Home equity is a wonderful thing, but it's also something that evaporates quickly as the economy and personal situations change. Combining new-boat lust with a seemingly vast source of money—cash you feel already belongs to you—could be a recipe for bad decisions.

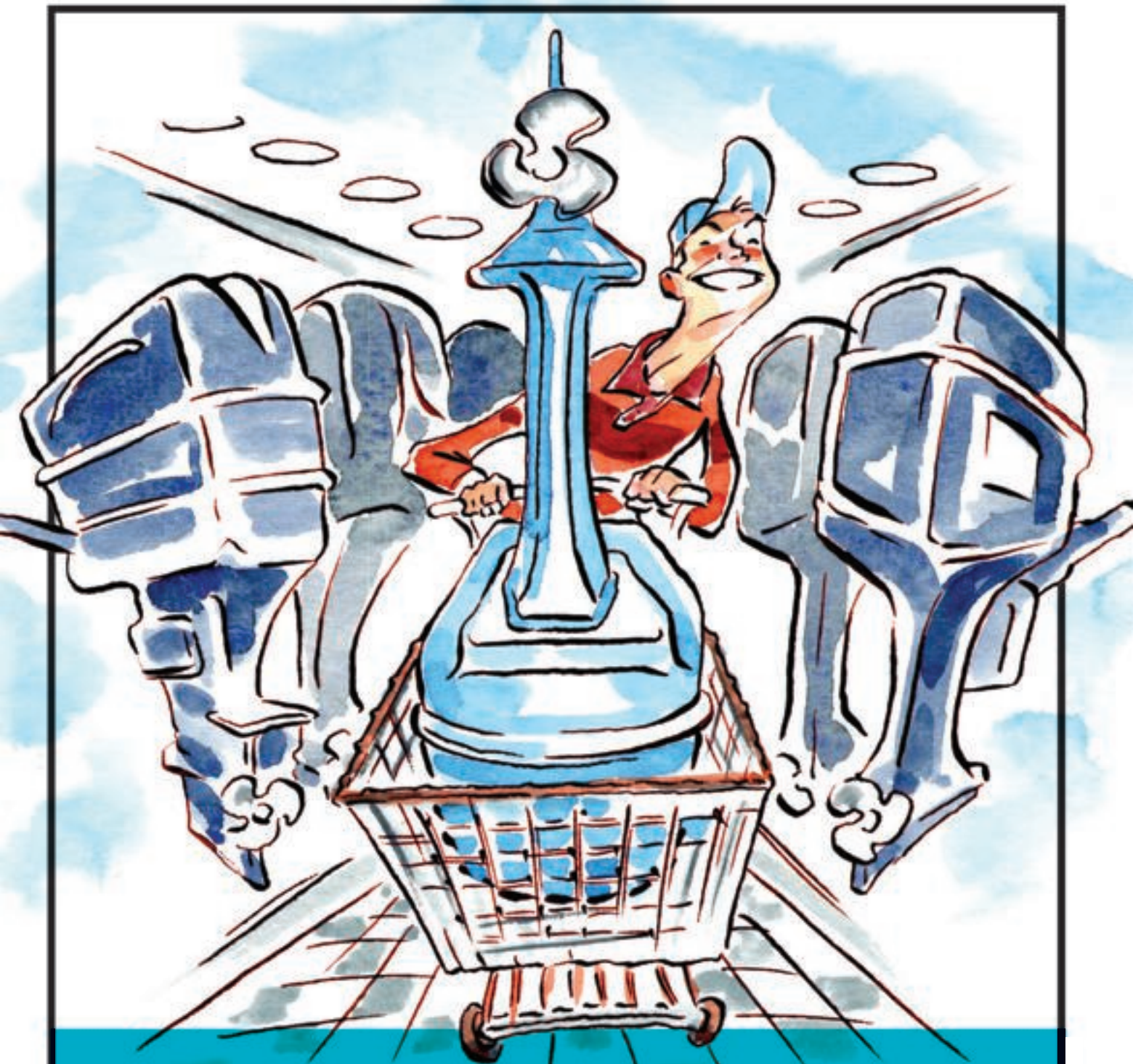
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**THE BOTTOM LINE:** Home equity can help you purchase a boat, but it comes with risks. Is the trade-off worth it to you?

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## WHAT ABOUT THE ENGINE?

Rising interest rates, higher boat prices and lack of inventory have led more people to hold on to their old boats and consider repowering to make their current boat new again. Thanks to the increasing interest, the repower demand—especially for outboard dealers handling popular brands such as Mercury, Yamaha, Suzuki and Honda—is stronger than ever.

These engine companies, however, are also faced with production and supply-chain issues. “Loose motors” (a term used for new engines sold to the repower market) are especially difficult to come by because motor manufacturers are working hard to supply OEM boatbuilder partners, who in turn are

working hard to catch up with their backlog of pre-sold boats.

Even in this environment, financing is available to fund the purchase of today’s high-powered outboard engines, which easily run from \$40,000 to over six figures, depending on the size and horsepower. Buyers can avail themselves of the same channels used to fund new-boat purchases. There are also specific repower financing programs offered by engine manufacturers through their authorized dealers. One example is Mercury Repower Financing, which offers financing programs for outboard (and sterndrive and inboard) repowers from \$5,000 to \$50,000.





## WEBMASTER WALLY

**T**his guy actually relishes the process of diving into various financing options and researching all the ins and outs for himself. Wally wouldn't entrust anybody else with the task of comparing the financing options from different banks and lenders to see how much he qualifies for, and how to structure a down payment and payment plan that suit his needs.

Wally doesn't have to be a financial wizard either, as long as he turns to trustworthy sources. The National Marine Lenders Association is an organization of banks, loan-origination companies, finance companies, credit unions and other industry professionals specializing in boat loans. While its primary purpose is to educate current and prospective lenders in marine financing procedures and promote marine lending within the industry, it can also be a valuable source of information for consumers. "Many national and regional financial institutions are NMLA members," Haymond says. Its

member banks and finance companies emphasize marine lending and can offer consumers the benefit of their experience in setting up boat loans for people from all walks of life.

The NMLA website ([marinelenders.org](http://marinelenders.org)) is an excellent source of information and advice for those researching boat-loan options. The "For Boat Buyers" section of the site provides resources, such as a member's directory, boat-loan basics, tax-deductibility information, a loan calculator and more.

"There has been a shift over the past six to eight years for consumers to finance online with a bank or credit union," Haymond says. "It is more convenient and efficient for consumers to shop multiple finance sources for marine loans from their home than the sometimes limited options at a dealership. Today, people are accustomed to shopping online, even for big-ticket items like boats, and then quickly flip over to financial marine sources to arrange financing in the

comforts of their home."

Google "boat loans," and your search engine will be swamped with links and ads for traditional banks, online banks, loan brokers and more, all promising quick and easy boat funding. For those willing to do the homework, there has never been so many different options to secure financing.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Surfing the web can be a quick and convenient way to find boat financing, but it can also be the Wild West. Make sure the financing you seek is from a trusted source.

### SEALING THE DEAL

This competition for your business and the wide range of lending choices are good things because they leave the boat buyer with more options for financing than ever before. Wading through it all might seem daunting. But if you're a motivated and resourceful buyer, you'll find a way to pursue—and fund—your passion.

# Like **FISH** in a **BARREL**

THE SPORT OF BOWFISHING IS TAKING OFF  
— AND LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF A WHOLE NEW STYLE OF BOAT.

*By Randy Vance*

**A**mong fishermen and hunters, there has been a slow tempest brewing with a white-noise hiss that barely catches the ear of the unconcerned. It came to my ear one afternoon as I channel-surfed past the hunting and fishing shows on television, and then backed up a couple of clicks on the remote.

Men stood on a huge flat-bottom johnboat, wearing olive drab and camo, with a platform at the bow from which they launched solid, white fiberglass arrows into the water. These angling archers hauled fish after fish on board, all skewered on a solid fiberglass shaft tied to a the end of a string.

I saw a boat like this recently and assumed it was for hunting Florida gators—and it could well do that too—but I soon learned that this boat type actually signaled the lighting of the fuse to an explosion of lights, boats, archery tackle and prize money—all from fishing with a bow and arrow.



**GRIZZLY  
2072 MVX**



PHOTOS: COURTESY/BASS PRO SHOPS/CHRIS IRWIN





## **A NEW OUTDOOR LEGACY**

John Paul Morris' addiction to bowfishing was so immediate, he bought the Oneida Eagle bow company. We shot its bows that night.



# A

A recent Bass Pro Shops catalog had one such bowfishing boat—a Grizzly 2072 MVX. And for goodness sake, I saw archery equipment in the fishing catalog.

With my interest piqued, I called Katie Mitchell, customer advocate at Bass Pro Shops. “What are the chances you could hook me up with a good bowfisherman who could show me how this game is played?”

## RIG AND ROLL

A few months later, I found myself standing at the archery counter of Bass Pro Shops’ flagship Outdoor World in Springfield, Missouri. Customers Tabitha and Greg Schlichter from Texas were milling about there too, pointing and speaking softly about the archery equipment hanging on the racks—bowfishing gear, to be exact. They had decided to get into the rapidly growing sport.

“We’ve gone gigging,” Greg said, the practice of spearing fish with a barbed-fork point, “but bowfishing is a first. We’ve never shot a fish before.”

“We’re moving to Corpus Christi,” Tabitha chimed in. “We’d go there fishing and see all these sheepshead along the water, but they never bite. So we’re gonna shoot them!”

But that’s not why most people are getting into it. At the counter, the archery tech named Ryan, a St. Louis transplant, was setting up a bow for another couple.

“Can you tell me what’s up with bowfishing?” I asked.

“There’s fast action, a lotta fish and not much regulation,” he replied. “Back in St. Louis, that’s all they’re doing. Asian carp and gar are taking over the rivers.”

I took a closer look at the bows and wondered what I was in for.

## THE NEW QUARRY

Asian grass carp are an invasive species, once imported to the US and bred as sterile grass and algae eaters. One or two in a large, algae-infested pond could restore the water to clarity in a matter of weeks, which is why they were in demand. But floods along the rearing ponds near the Mississippi River System accidentally released the nonsterile breeding stock into the river tributaries, and the infestation of all US waters throughout the Louisiana Purchase is now



unstoppable. Today, by some research estimates, these waterways and much of the US have as much as 80 percent of their biomass made up of various carp species, all of them nonnative and destructive to native habitat. One National Park Service website indicates that the carp infestation is so hopeless, we should just learn to appreciate them. And it now looks like bowfishermen are. “Where I come from, there are so many carp, that’s all fishermen are doing,” Ryan explained while putting the final tweak on a customer’s bow. “It’s a heck of a time shooting these things.”



## PRE-RIGGED FOR BOWFISHING

Bass Pro Shops offers many bowfishing options and all the accessories needed for the sport.

PHOTOS: COURTESY BASS PRO SHOPS/CHRIS IRWIN





"THERE'S FAST ACTION, A LOTTA FISH AND NOT MUCH REGULATION. IN ST. LOUIS, THAT'S ALL THEY'RE DOING. ASIAN CARP AND GAR ARE TAKING OVER THE WATERWAYS."

Garfish are another matter. These prehistoric natives have no natural-born predators except man, and, because of their nearly impenetrable plate-armor skin, you need tin snips to relieve them from their fillets. Their numbers multiply, nearly unchecked by anglers, and they eat other, more-favored fish. These are the other primary targets for bowfishermen.

I think I heard somebody describe the action as "pandemonium."

### CREATING COMPETITION

For those most afflicted with this adrenaline rush, there is the Bowfishing Association of America. Among other things, BAA keeps

track of world-record kills, like the 244-pound, 8-ounce alligator gar shot by Robin Parks of Texas in 2005. Another boat-sinking trophy—a 92-pound, 8-ounce big-head carp—was shot by Darren Opel in Illinois.

Want more thrills? Add competition to the mix. There were always bowfishing tournaments, but not to the standards set by Bass Pro Shops' US Open Bowfishing Championship. Boasting \$50,000 in cash prizes, the promise of bowfishing fame, and a roster of fish-shooting celebrities to sign autographs and give shooting tips, the tournament should inspire newbies to jump in whole hog.

In fact, one such fellow goes by the

### ASIAN CARP

Carp make up about 80 percent of the biomass in most North American inland waters, according to some studies. They are nonnative fish and wreak havoc on the native species by devouring vegetation and rooting up spawning beds. There is no creel limit.



## LIGHTS, ARROWS, ACTION!

Carp are usually reluctant to leave an area they're grazing, even when spotlighted, but tonight there was more hunting, less shooting.



nickname Pig Man—not for his demeanor, but for his habit of using a bow and arrow to take down wild hogs (as equally destructive to habitat as Asian carp). Pig Man soon knocked his arrows for porky carp and shot them with such regularity that his seminars made the marquis of the world's first Bass Pro Shops Bowfishing World's Fair.

### MY TURN

After my introduction at Outdoor World, I wanted to have my crack at these records—but I hadn't pulled a bow string in at least 15 years, and the last time I shot a carp was in 1972 on the Lake of the Ozarks with a laminated recurve bow trailing what we called “trotline

string”: a nylon cord stout enough to moor a small boat. The arrow bounced off and the carp cut a wake, speeding away.

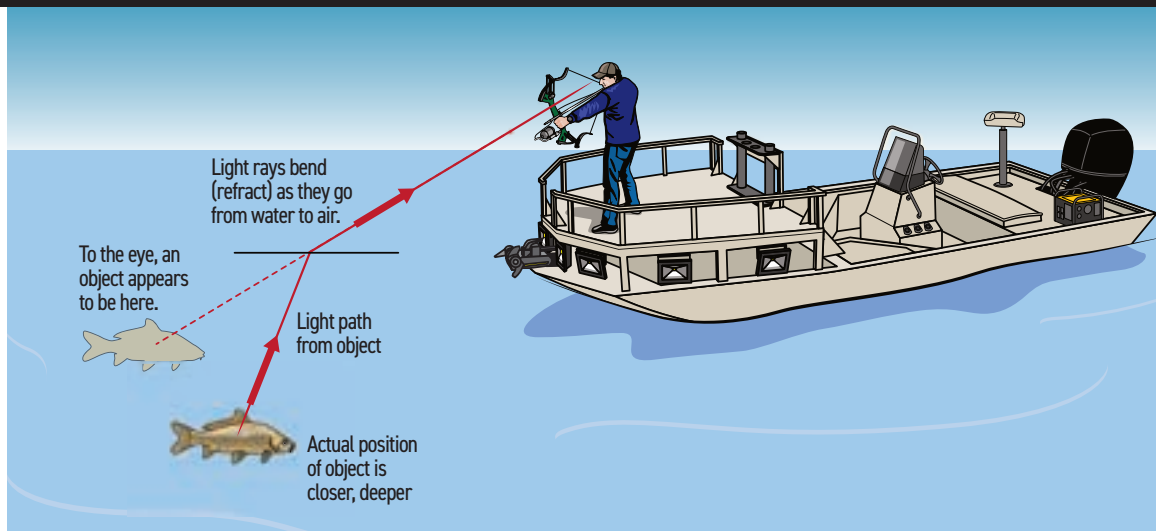
I'd remember that experience during my hunt with John Paul Morris, founder of the US Open Bowfishing Championship and the inspiration behind a new line of factory-rigged bowfishing boats—and a new brand of bowfishing tackle under the name Archenemy. And, yes, he's the son of Bass Pro Shops founder, Johnny Morris, and a fair chip off the old block with the capable knack of spotting trends in outdoor sports. He was the pro who Katie hooked me up with.

At a ramp on Stockton Lake about an hour west of Springfield, we launched Tracker

PHOTO: COURTESY BASS PRO SHOPS/CHRIS IRWIN;  
ILLUSTRATION: TIM BARKER

## REFRACTION

An understanding of this phenomenon is important to bow hunters, anglers who might want to sight-cast to fish, and, in fact, to all shallow-water boaters. Avoiding what you can see is often more important than connecting with it—just ask any boater who might be probing a flat or may have wandered off course into a shoal area. —Kevin Falvey





Marine's special Grizzly 2072 MVX bowfishing boat and pulled away from the dock. Under the red glow of last light, my assigned bow glared in lime-green camo, bright enough so that the guys could keep track of where it was pointing, even in the dark.

Morris propped our bows, arrows nocked, across the top of the only aftermarket accessory we needed: a Rubbermaid garbage can that served as creel and quiver. My bowfishing reel, studded to the front of my bow below the arrow nock, was a technological leap from the tapered spool I once wound my trotline string around. This was like a push-button Zebco fishing reel with a wider opening for the line. The line wasn't the mono used for fishing nor the trotline string that trailed my old arrows. This was more like dental floss, and when I first loosed an arrow, it felt as though it weren't even there. The arrow flew as fast and true as...well, as true as I could shoot it.

We wound through the labyrinth of the Corps of Engineers impoundment for 15 minutes or so—about enough time for me to have lost my way—and eased into a cove, dropping off plane. Big Al (that's all he offered as a moniker), our helmsman and shooting partner for the night, snapped a switch, and the battery-powered LED lights immediately flooded the cove, making the



## THE MAKING OF A FISH BOW

The tech person at the Bass Pro Shops archery counter pointed me to a rack of bowfishing bows all rigged and ready to shoot with reel, line, arrow and sights. This, of course, is the Bass Pro Shops way. The bows started in the \$300 price range.

"You can start slapping things on any old bow you like, and it will work fine," the tech said. "But if you get into it, you'll be spending some money."

By the time a competitive archer has rigged his perfect fisher, he could easily have more than \$700 in it, or more. No wonder Morris launched his own archery company by buying Oneida.

- The bow is a system of limbs and pulleys that relieves the archer's arms of half the draw weight of the bow. At the ideal 45 pounds, at full draw, the archer may have to hold only 22 pounds. Heavier draw weights simply break arrows.
- While hunting bows have sights, sighting along the arrow is plenty accurate for fishing's close range. But many tournament winners add sights anyway.
- Some reels are push-button versions to release the line in preparation for the shot. We kept our reels open. If you forget to push the button, the line will snap and the arrow will be lost.
- The arrow is solid fiberglass for the strength and momentum needed to penetrate water and the tough scales of fish. The point screws in, locking the barbs in place. Sometimes the point and barb need to be removed to get the fish off the arrow.

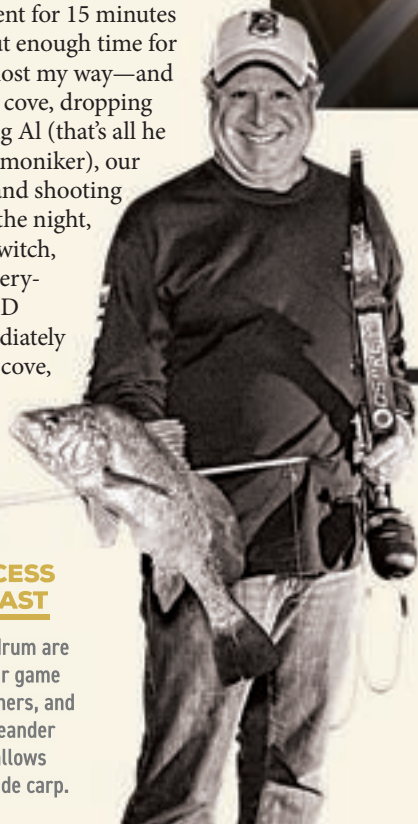
CAMO ISN'T REQUIRED, BUT ANGLERS SHOULD CHOOSE COLORS TO BLEND WITH THE DARK OR LIGHT SKY. YOU DON'T NEED A CAP, BUT THIS ONE WAS A GIFT FROM MORRIS AND BIG AL.

## SUCCESS AT LAST

Black drum are also fair game for archers, and they meander the shallows alongside carp.

surrounding Ozark hardwoods as brilliant as a theater set. The lights ran on batteries for a time, and then Big Al would yank the 12-volt genset/charger cord to give them new life. Our stage of operations was literally a stage. The shooting platform was nearly 9 feet square and about 3 feet above the helm deck of this 20-foot flat-bottomed johnboat.

Turns out, Morris had a strong hand in the design, and Tracker Marine worked to broaden the bow to add 10 inches to the shooting deck. A low rail around it





THE TRACKER GRIZZLY 2072 MVX IS PROBABLY THE FIRST ARCHERY BOAT EVER DESIGNED READY TO FISH OR HUNT, WITH THE RIGGING MADE FAMOUS BY TRACKER MARINE. THE SHOOTING DECK IS REMOVABLE, MAKING IT IDEAL FOR FISHING AND DUCK HUNTING TOO.

reminded my feet of the edge. There were cup holders in a leaning rail aft with more quivers for extra arrows. An electric trolling motor guided us along. Sometimes we'd just motor in on the Merc outboard. "Sometimes you can fill that barrel pretty fast," Morris said.

#### WHY THEY CALL IT HUNTING

We eased along in the cove, and the only fish we saw skittered out from under us before

we could let an arrow fly. So we slipped into the next cove, this time moving ourselves along using only the near-silent electric Minn Kota.

Our targets could be silver carp, big-head carp, buffalo and black drum, the latter being the only other native freshwater species besides gar still considered a rough fish and a fair target for archers.

Standing on my left, Morris drew, unnoticed by me, and let an arrow fly. Our photographer, Chris Irwin, yelled out, "Great shot!" An arrow pinned an Asian carp, and Morris cranked it in and, after being photographed, shook it into the Rubbermaid.

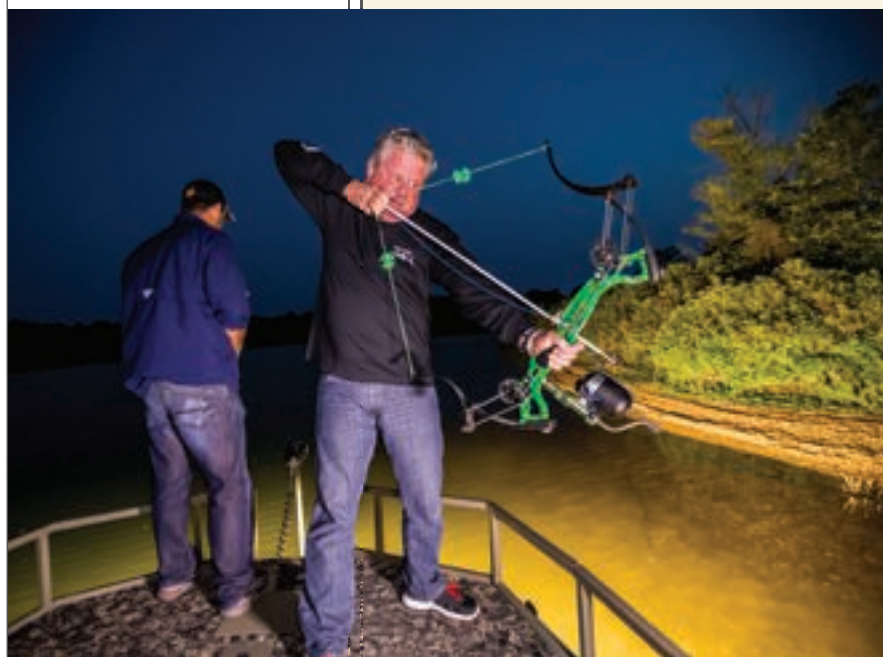
That raised the question: What would one do with a barrel of these fish? Turns out, Bass Pro Shops made sure that question had a responsible answer.

First, they really aren't bad to eat. The problem is usually small bones. Many anglers fillet the carp, chunk the fillets, and then score the meat (make rows of thin cuts not quite through the chunk) to cut the fine bones in small pieces that seem to cook away in frying. If you can skin a gar, do the same to its meat.

Most cooks fry them hot and fast in an outside cooker. How do they taste?

"Like crappie," Morris said. "They're pretty good."

But there are other ways of ethically handling these fish.



PHOTOS: COURTESY BASS PRO SHOPS/CHRIS IRWIN



## THE MAKING OF A BOWFISHING BOAT

"The average guy doesn't want to tinker with boats," Morris reflected, "so we made this [Grizzly 2072 MVX] ready to go."

The needs of a bowfisherman aren't that much different from anglers. You need a stable platform, reliable power, the silence of an electric trolling motor, and a platform high enough to offer a better view into the water.

- The Grizzly johnboat is flat-bottomed for superior stability during the chaos of a successful shoot. There's space enough in it for several shooters to safely draw, release and retrieve the arrow.
- The shooting deck gives a vantage point to see farther and deep into the water. It's removable for fishing or waterfowl hunting.
- Lights surround the deck to illuminate the whole waterway and fish below. LEDs operate on 12 volts and are safer for boaters to maintain than AC current.
- A gas-powered generator to run a 12-volt charger is essential to keep lights lit.
- Easy-to-clean nonskid decking, such as this dense foam surface, quiets footsteps whether fishing, bowfishing or duck hunting.
- The foot-operated trolling motor is silent to sneak up on fish. A 24- to 36-volt system is required, and electronic pedal steering is essential to keep the bow hands-free.
- Rod holders, arrow quivers and cold-drink holders keep essentials within easy reach.



"At our tournament we have a company waiting to collect the fish and convert them into organic fertilizer," Morris said. "We've taken them to turtle farms too."

I took the bow for the next few shots.

"Shoot low. Light refraction will fool you," Morris said.

What I found after four or five near misses is that an aim pointed a few inches below the head would usually get the arrow close to a body shot, though Morris seemed to be bagging them with a head shot. For me, you have to pick a spot, like a gill plate or an eyeball. If you just aim generally at the fish, you'll miss. They're a slow-moving target until the arrow breaks the water. Then they rocket forward, confounding the best archers.

Finally, after all those misses, I lined up the arrow, and when I released, it stayed true. Soon I hoisted my first kill, a smaller one than

Morris', but heck, it was a hit. And the only record we wanted was an exciting experience and photos to remember it.

When we had five or six fish in the barrel, one of which was mine, we shut down the motor and drifted up against a log. The air was beautiful, the night clear and, with the motor and genset off, silent. Fish splashed in the distance, and a great blue heron squawked in the tree above, relaxing as we quieted down. We talked in low tones of why the fish seemed more elusive tonight—maybe fronts or the waxing moon. We talked of African hunting, goose hunting in western Missouri's flyway, turkey hunting in the spring, and bowfishing.

I thought about whether I could add a third boat to my fleet and maybe a new bow. And I decided that night, it would be the turtle farm for our quarry.

### ROLL OUT THE BARREL

There's something revealing in the inglorious presence of a garbage can to creel your catch.





## APOLOGY ACCEPTED

Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble.

**I**n the course of a normal lifetime, we will all face the task of making an uncomfortable apology, perhaps to our dog or spouse, the IRS, a judge, or even our Creator. My good friend Chuck Larson was recently forced to make a public atonement from a bar stool at the Lake View Inn. It was a minor humiliation, but it got his outboard repaired.

Chuck has never been known to sail on an even keel, but he was especially agitated that Saturday evening at the bar. (Nautical note: “even keel”—a term used figuratively since the mid-1800s, which alludes to keeping a vessel’s keel in a level position, ensuring smooth sailing.)

“I’ll never buy another Mercury outboard,” Chuck fumed as he swirled in his vodka olives skewered on a little red sword. “The Pro Kicker on my new Alumacraft is junk. Worked fine last weekend. Now it won’t start. Won’t even tease me with a little chuff skewering. I sat there in the middle of the lake for an hour and finally just gave up on it.”

“Fuel, spark and compression are the elements of internal combustion,” Wally said from behind the bar.

“Wally, I’m no greenhorn,” Chuck replied. “I checked all of that.”

From the end of the bar, Dan the Outboard Man had been quietly listening to Chuck rant. Now he spoke.

“Say, Chuck, last weekend, how far did you run your boat after you forgot to tilt up your kicker?”

Up and down the bar, heads swiveled from Dan to Chuck, who sputtered in his drink and stared at Dan. “Ah, a few miles I guess. But so what?!”

“You left your kicker in the water, and it was in gear,” Dan said. “You fired up the big motor and took off at 40 miles per hour. This caused your kicker prop to rotate backward with enough force to turn the crankshaft backward, probably at about 6,000 rpm. With the engine rotating in reverse, the pistons were sucking when the exhaust valves opened, drawing air and eventually water up the exhaust tube. Water entered the combustion chamber and hydrolocked a cylinder. The flywheel had enough inertia at this speed that when the engine locked up, it sheared off its key.”

The bar was silent. Once again, everyone was astounded at the depth of Dan’s knowledge.

“Your kicker won’t start because the flywheel shifted on the crank, and now the ignition is hopelessly out of time. I could fix it in your driveway in about 20 minutes. Just pull the flywheel and replace the key,” Dan said. “But first,

**“Your kicker won’t start because the flywheel shifted on the crank, and now the ignition is hopelessly out of time.”**

you are going to stand on that stool and apologize to the departed soul of Carl Kiekhaefer and to all of the engineers at Mercury who designed a perfectly good outboard that only a knucklehead like you could break.”

Chuck sulked over his drink, and then sulked over another. And then he mounted his stool and uttered a public apology that was so eloquent, it earned a round of applause from the Lake View throng. I’m not sure it would have satisfied Old Man Kiekhaefer, but it was enough to get his kicker fixed.





# HAULIN' SS

Suzuki Marine has unleashed a powerful new SS Series of outboards as seen at the 2023 Redcrest & Bassmaster Classic events.

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- Asymmetrical Skeg
- Redesigned lower unit with low water pickups
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