

Selecting_And_Using_A_Boat_As_A_Floating_Retreat_2004.txt

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Newsgroups: misc.survivalism
Subject: Selecting And Using A Boat As A Floating Retreat
From: taxhaven@ix.netcom.com(Adam Starchild)
Date: 7 May 1996 18:46:26 GMT

SELECTING AND USING A BOAT AS A FLOATING RETREAT

by

Adam Starchild

Man's earliest commercial transportation of importance was by sail boat. If you could have stood on the banks of the Nile River, as long ago as 3000 B.C., you could have seen flat-bottomed boats sailing upriver to the capital city of Memphis, Egypt. The prowess of the Phoenician sailor was to become legendary, and indeed, the spread of early civilization was due in large part to the commerce established by the captains of sailing ships, as they plied their trade in the ports of the ancient seats of civilization. So reliable did sailing ships become, in fact, that when Christopher Columbus made his fateful voyage of discovery in 1492, his biggest problem was a crew that became fearful and mutinous because they were sailing in uncharted waters.

Columbus made his remarkable and unprecedeted voyage -- notwithstanding the trouble that he encountered -- in slightly over two months, carrying a party of eighty-eight persons on his three sailing ships. Now, as a hypothetical question --: Given the state of the geographical and navigational knowledge of his

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day, could Columbus have made his voyage with any more anticipation of success in engine-powered boats? Surprisingly, the answer is no. For starters, considering the King's and Queen's reluctance to finance the voyage, what might their reaction have been if they were asked to provide and provision three engine-powered boats of comparable size? What might have been the result, when the Pinta put in for repairs, if Columbus were told that engine parts were unavailable because of a machinists' strike in Tenerife?

However, putting aside such considerations as the dependence of powered boats on the vagaries of economics and politics, what about their seaworthiness? Is it only the hearty -- or foolhardy -- that dare venture forth on them? The fact is that, except in very large sizes, the sail boat is more seaworthy than its engine-powered counterpart. It is a little-known fact that sails have such a steadyng effect on a boat that some engine-powered boats are equipped with a small set of sails, to be used in an emergency.

Fortunately, the sail boat hasn't gone the way of the horse-and-buggy, or the steam car, because a few people still think enough of this ancient but reliable mode of travel that this continue to manufacture sail boats, as well as do-it-yourself kits in various stages of completion. And for the do-it-yourselfer who's not afraid to tackle a big job (up to four years of concentrated part-time effort), there are sail boat plans available.

So, if you've got a yet for travel, the sailing boat might be for you. It offers a little of the best of all possible worlds:

It offers self containment. If your boat is large enough, you can carry household goods, as well as the accumulated possessions of a lifetime, that you would normally leave behind with other forms of transportation.

It offers security. With a sail boat as a base of

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operations, and with a flair for independence, you might pick up extra money from diving, fishing, or chartering tourists on pleasure or fishing trips.

It offers freedom. Consider, for example, the feeling of waiting in a service station line (a possibility that still looms in the future), as compared to being propelled over the water by free wind power. Gasoline and diesel fuel shortages, state and federal regulations that are imposed upon land (and air) vehicles -- all are a form of state tyranny that you can escape on a sail boat.

And perhaps not least, is the thrill of discovery. There are few places, available by land vehicles, that are not overrun and spoiled by civilization. Your discovery -- much as Columbus' -- might be the beauty and solitude of some nearly uninhabited island, or the peace and non-regimentation of a society less "civilized" than the one you left behind.

As a matter of practicality your choice between a sail boat and other forms of transportation, such as powered boats, land vehicles, etc., is made just as you make all other choices -- by weighing the advantages against the disadvantages. I've listed many of the advantages of the sail boat, so what are its disadvantages? There are only two significant disadvantages: (1) The sail boat is relatively slow, and (2) The sail boat requires relatively more skill to operate. It is my opinion that these disadvantages are slight as compared to the advantages, making the sail boat the best possible choice for a floating retreat.

Once you've made your decision to obtain a sail boat, either by buying it or by building it from plans or kits, you'll do just as you would if you were about to engage in any other sport, hobby, or avocation: You will learn all you can about sail boats, sailing techniques, maintenance, and navigational methods and equipment.

Generally speaking, there are two basic kinds of sail boats, the monohull and the multihull. Further, the multihull boat can

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be either the catamaran (two hulls), or the trimaran (three hulls).

Monohull

As its name implies, the monohull is a single hull boat. It's a traditional boat, which is an advantage, because it's been around, in some form or other, for centuries. This means that if your choice is ultimately for the monohull, you'll have many to choose from. The monohull can carry more weight than a comparable multihull boat, but has the disadvantage of being comparatively slow, with a speed of about seven knots (a knot is equal to 1.15 statute miles per hour). Another disadvantage of the monohull is largely one of comfort, because it heels some 20 to 40 degrees to the leeward. Another, more serious disadvantage is the heavy keel of the monohull boat, which virtually assures sinking if water leaks into the hull through a break. Also, running aground in a keeled boat often results in the loss of the boat.

Catamaran

Because of the upsurge in sail boat interest, and to overcome the disadvantages of the single-hulled boat, the multihulls are gaining in popularity. Actually, the multihulls predate the monohulls, having been developed in the South Pacific islands many centuries ago. It was probably their comparative complexity, in an era when man was intrigued with mechanization, that cause their decline in popularity. Now, however, catamarans are available that are very fast, capable of 30 knots, and with a heel of less than 15 degrees, which makes them fairly comfortable. Moreover, if the catamaran is properly build, and

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equipped with flotation material, the non-keel construction makes it unsinkable, even if both hulls become filled with water. From the standpoint of comfort, the catamaran scores rather poorly, because the living arrangement is hampered by two widely separated hulls. A more serious disadvantage of the catamaran is its susceptibility to capsize in gusty winds (a capsized boat is not a sinking boat, *per se*, but is nonetheless a serious problem when it occurs far out to sea).

Trimarans

The three-hulled trimaran overcomes most of the problems of both the monohull and the catamaran. Like the catamaran, it is fast -- about 30 knots -- and relatively comfortable, with a maximum heel of only nine degrees. Because of a large central hull, comfortable living quarters can be arranged, and in trimarans over forty feet long, there is a living space in the two outer hulls, as well as in the central hull. Surprisingly, the trimaran is less expensive initially, and has more volume, than a monohull of the same length. For an additional advantage, the rigging is lighter. Perhaps the principal disadvantages of the trimaran are that it will carry less weight than the monohull, and a large beam (width) makes it not too easy to find a slip from which to launch it. However, slips of any width are rare outside the U. S., so that with the growing popularity of the trimaran, when new slips are at last built, they will be built to accommodate this three-hulled boat. Finally, add to all the advantages of comfort, the advantage in the fact that the trimaran is unsinkable (if equipped with adequate flotation material), and that, to the best of anyone's knowledge, it is uncapsizable. The logical conclusion is that the trimaran is the best choice in sail boats as floating retreats.

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Rigging

The best choice for rigging is a ketch or yawl rig, each with two masts, as compared to the sloop, with only one mast. Even though the sloop is slightly faster, a divided -- or two-masted -- rig offers more ease of handling, as well as a greater variety of sail plans for different weather conditions.

Boat Size

Once you've decided on a trimaran, because of its comparatively better safety, mobility, and comfort features, what size trimaran would suit you best? Just as with any other major purchase, decision must be a fine balance between your needs, desires, and budget.

The 25- to 30-foot trimaran will accommodate one or two persons, but in a rather cramped style. Moreover, there is not a lot of room on the 25 to 30-footer to stock supplies for an extended cruise.

The 35-foot trimaran will take two to six people in reasonable comfort.

The 40- to 45-foot trimaran will accommodate four to ten persons with plenty of space.

The 50- to 60-foot trimaran is, relatively speaking, a luxury liner. It will take from six to fourteen people.

Shopping for the Boat

If you can afford it, the best way to get a boat is to buy it, completely built and outfitted. When you buy from a reputable dealer, you will know it is seaworthy and reliable. On

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the opposite end of the financial spectrum, you may want to buy boat plans and build your own; however, as I pointed out earlier, this is a major project for even the heartiest do-it-yourselfer, requiring skill, patience and time to complete. Kits, in various stages of completion, are available to the do-it-yourselfer. Or you can buy a partially built boat, which you can complete. Or you can buy a boat that is built, but not outfitted. Or you can shop for a used boat. Before buying a used boat, however, familiarize yourself with prices, construction principles, and features to look for in a boat. And finally, before buying any boat that is for any reason uninspected, have your prospective purchase inspected for flaws by a marine surveyor who specializes in trimarans.

Learning to Sail

Buy books that contain information on sailing and other marine subjects. Also, it would be well to buy marine charts, not only of your immediate area, but also of other possible destinations. Study the books and charts. Learn as much of the terminology of boats and sailing as you can, so you can ask intelligent, relevant questions from experts.

After studying the subject of boating as thoroughly as possible, there is no substitute for practice, as a means of learning. But this doesn't mean that you should immediately buy your cruising boat, outfit it, and go to sea. A better method would be to buy a good, used practice boat -- about a 10- to 20-footer -- which would give you an economical way to get the feel of sailing.

As a practice boat, the best buy is a sloop, with one mast and two sails. One sail can be a small jib forward of the mast; and the other a larger mainsail aft of the mast. By no means should your first experience in handling a sail boat be in a

catboat, which has the mast in the extreme end of the bow, and has only one sail. A small catamaran would suffice as a practice boat, but better yet would be a small trimaran, which will emulate the mobility and maneuverability of the larger trimaran that you will ultimately acquire.

Navigating

The basic principles of navigation haven't changed considerably over the centuries, because natural navigational aids, such as the sun, and other fixed stars, don't change their places in the celestial sphere. Many engine-powered boat owners find it mandatory to equip their boats with electronic direction-finding equipment, which in the end amounts to high-price gadgetry, to comply with local regulations. However, the sail boat owner is, strangely, subject to fewer of these rules and regulations. What you will need is a knowledge of a simplified system of navigation; you'll need a sextant, either new or used;; and you will need a battery-powered, transistorized, short-wave radio for picking up time signals. With your sextant, practice taking sun sights by which to calculate the latitude and longitude of your location.

Using Your Boat

Learn to use your boat the same way that you would learn to use any mobile equipment that requires operating skill -- by taking short trips at first. For instance, if you live around Los Angeles, you can take your practice trips to San Diego. From the Puget Sound area you can visit the ports of British Columbia. From Florida, you might even discover some of the thrill that was Columbus', on October 12, 1492, when his first landfall was the

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Bahamas Islands. Good Sailing!

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