

Trawler Talk

Buying a Boat from a Women's Perspective by Karen Schuler

There has been a gradual shift in boat buying, especially in the trawler market. It used to be pretty much a "man's world" as I remember back to displaying boats at the big shows like Chicago and Detroit. The percentage of men versus women attending the show was obvious.....he decided which boat to buy, he decided which marina to keep it at, he took care of all the maintenance including cleaning it, and sometimes he could get his wife to come with him on short trips. For some it is still like this. But the trawler world and the dream of long-range cruising have changed the market. Having just completed 3 days of showing boats at the trawler fest, it was evident that the majority of attendees were couples. Women are taking a much greater role in the selection and use of a boat.



Karen Schuler at the helm of PDQ 34 Power Catamaran

As I jot down notes on what I see women focusing on I realize it can be categorized as the five C's of Color, Comfort, Cleaning, Control, and Cost and the five S's of Style, Storage, Safety, Sea-keeping and Sensible. Now I'm not saying that men don't look at all the same things, but for the sake of this article, I'm just going to talk about how I feel as a woman and how I witness other women discussing and asking the same things.

COLOR – on the exterior, women do like the hull colors, especially navy blue, but always have concerns with fading. With the new gelcoats and good UV protectant waxes, the colored hulls can be kept looking beautiful for 8-10 years before painting. This is true of even the all-white boats if you want to keep the shiny, new look. The interior colors most popular with women are the beiges and tans, but not too light as to show grandchildren's fingerprints. With these neutral colors, they can decorate with any color scheme they like by adding pillows, lamps, candles, baskets, etc.

COMFORT – women look at the arrangement of the settees and chairs in relationship to how they can be used for reading, dining, watching TV, and having guests, depending on what is important to them and their family. How many steps there are and how easy the steps are to walk are important issues in comfortably getting around on the boat. The number of handrails and the logical placement of them can also enhance the ease of moving from one area to another. The size and style of the berths are important for women, not so much for how they sleep but for how easy or hard it is to make the bed and to get in and out of the bed. We do like our staterooms to resemble our bedrooms at home. The use of space in the heads and showers with a reasonable vanity, good placement of mirrors, and useful storage will go a long way to please a woman. And of course, there is the galley. It better be workable with double sinks, counter space, ample food and equipment storage and lots of accessible outlets. Here's where the occasional male cook can be even more demanding than a woman!

CLEANING – we don't talk a lot about this because it's the part we'd just as soon not think about, but probably should. I have been the boat cleaner in our business and I can tell you to pay attention to how easy it is to walk around the exterior of the boat. Of course not all boats are large enough to have full side decks with hand rails but for those that don't, the effective placement of hand rails and enough of them can make a huge difference. Limiting all the exposed wood to the interior of the boat can also diminish the amount of upkeep. Oiled teak is the easiest to take care of in that a yearly "oiling" will keep it looking like new for years to come. You just need to pay more attention to areas that may get wet, like wood steps.

CONTROL – more women today are interested in learning to handle the boat and not just at the wheel while underway but doing the docking as well. They pay attention to things like bow thrusters, big rudders, good visibility all around, and comfortable and adjustable helm seats.

COST – suppose we could say this is a no-brainer because we all know we need to find a boat that fits into our budget and financial planning. Let's just say women are more involved than ever in this decision as they should be.

Now for the S's:

STYLE – as we know this is a very subjective term but women do look at the overall lines of the boat and will find some far more appealing than others. They also consider the interior layout to determine if it fits their idea of living aboard. Many of the things I've talked about earlier play into this choice.

STORAGE – this should probably be in bold letters! If you expect a woman to live on a boat for extended periods of time, there better be lots of places to organize her stuff. Drawers on tracks that pull all the way out, handy dividers and adjustable shelves, hanging lockers that look more like closets, and good use of every nook and cranny will satisfy a woman's need to put things away.

SAFETY – women will pay attention to the height and location of handrails both exterior and interior as well as easy-walking steps to prevent falls and keep children and pets safely on the boat. Interior placement of fire extinguishers, carbon monoxide detectors, and propane sensors, if there is a propane stove, are all very important.

SEA-KEEPING – this is also a very big issue. It can get lost at a boat show where the focus may be on the interior design and layout. But we tell our perspective buyers that 50% of their consideration in buying a boat is to look at what is below the waterline to be sure they are aware of the kind of performance they will get in all kinds of sea conditions. Semi-displacement trawlers shine in this area with their full keel, hard chines, and large rudder that keep the boat tracking straight and stable in a challenging sea.

SENSIBLE – how much does she burn??? From a woman's perspective, we want to be able to cruise to far away romantic and scenic places and don't want to see our vacation dollars coming out our exhaust. Again, you're talking trawlers and catamarans as the most fuel efficient boats on the water. We also need an attitude adjustment to realize we can go slow and relax more as we enjoy the scenery and each other on our home on the water.

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