

BUYING A USED BOAT FROM THE US

With the recent economic changes many Canadian buyers are looking at the lower prices south of the border. While there may be some pretty good deals there are a few things to be aware of. If the boat was built outside the NAFTA countries it is going to be subject to duty and if built within, it will still pick up a customs brokerage fee, PST and GST tab and then there is the high cost of transporting it home after you have done lien checks. So you figure in the costs and still think it's a deal. Dig a little deeper before you hand over your money. Just because you are buying a boat from Michigan does 'not mean it didn't come from Louisiana or Florida. I have seen boats advertised as "fresh water" boats which turned out to be "salties" under the shine. How do you choose a surveyor from across the border ? the yellow pages or how about using the one the broker recommends or how about the broker who does the surveys himself ?.....can you spell conflict of interest. Yes there may be a few deals but you had better do your homework.

You will be better off working through a broker but only if the broker is familiar with importing boats to Canada and knows how to deal with Canada Customs, applicable taxes, lien clearance and USCG documentation releases. This can be complicated stuff if you or your broker are unfamiliar with it. Choose your broker as carefully as you choose your surveyor.

SALT WATER BOATS

Millions of people down south deal with salt corrosion all the time and to them it's simply a way of life.

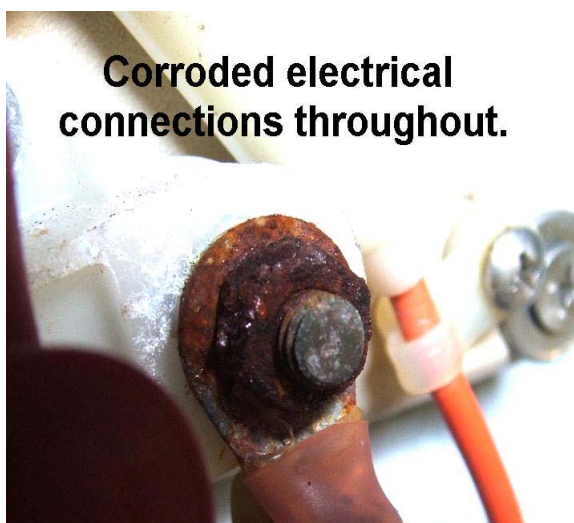
A surveyor in Florida may not make an issue out of corrosion because it's expected however, in our fresh water market a "saltie" is worth less and with very good reason. A corroded terminal can be easily replaced but if the terminal is rusted then you are guaranteed the corrosion has crept up the conductor.....rewiring a boat can be a very expensive project, I know of one recent 35' sinker (sailboat) re-wired for \$60k.

An engine can be steam cleaned and painted, but what about the internal water galleys, gears in the lower unit, inside the exhaust manifolds and cylinder heads. A lot of this stuff you won't see until you pay a mechanic to take it apart and fix it. A good clean up can hide a lot. Even the best surveyor cannot see the bottom of the fuel tank and this is where aluminum corrosion usually resides. Getting the shaft flange off a fresh water boat is usually a 10 minute job, on a salt water boat with corroded nuts & bolts you could be paying a mechanic for a full days work. Same goes for fuel injectors or spark plugs. Unless you have deep pockets or the skills and time to do these things your self, your bargain may well cost more than if you had bought a fresh water boat in the first place and will still likely sell for less when the time comes to move up.

The next three pictures are from the same "saltie"

While the engine compartment (*right*) sparkles, difficult to access areas (*below*) showed extensive corrosion such the electrical terminal and fuel tank fitting shown below. I could not get into these two areas but my camera did.

If the terminals look like the one shown below it's a safe bet, the entire conductor (and how many others) is shot.



Corroded electrical connections throughout.



ALUMINUM OXIDE ON FUEL TANK AT STB FUEL FEED FITTING

HURRICANE BOATS

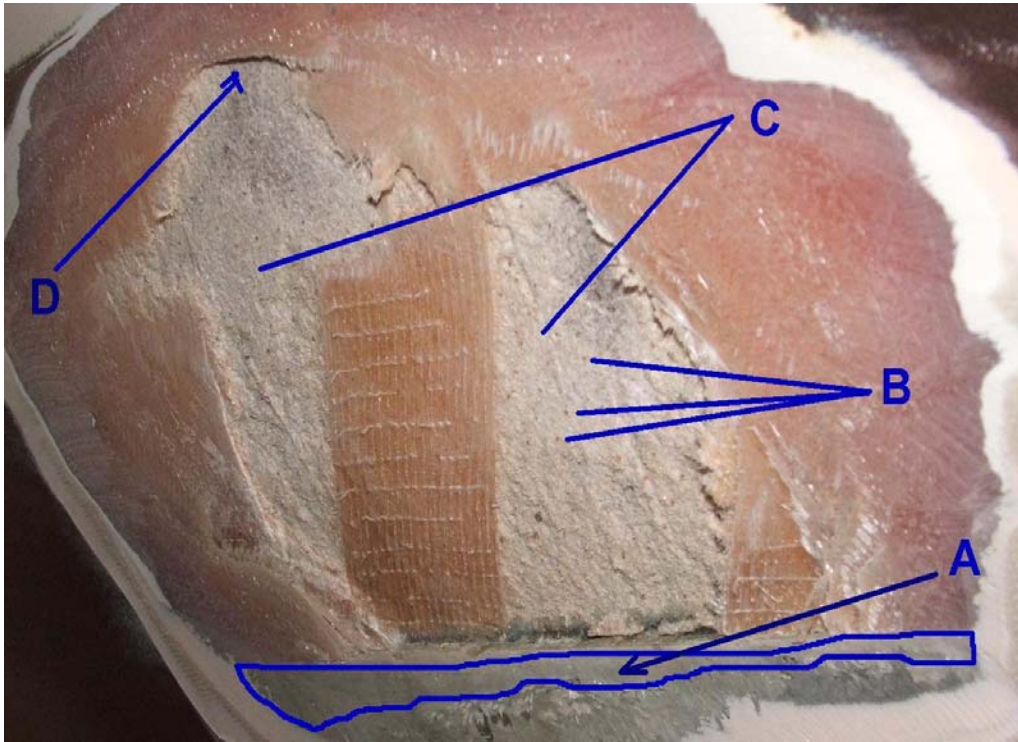
The last few years have seen a large number of "hurricane" boats brought north into the upper US states and Canada. One southern broker told me half the hurricane boats he sold were sold to Canadians. Several dealers and individuals have bought many of these boats, patched them up and a large number of them are showing up on the market with very attractive prices. I want to emphasize that some of these are reputable people doing an honest repair job and making a fair profit. Other less reputable people are doing cover up jobs and flogging shiny junk with fresh paint.

(she ain't pretty she just looks that way).

Some of these boats are turning up in auctions where buyers only get a very limited looksee before bidding.....if they won't let you crawl all over and through the boat keep that bid card in your pocket. I have seen some with very good cosmetic cover-ups and it can be very hard to detect problem areas under the new shine.

This example shown in the next photo had just been totally re-finished by one repairer trying to make a fair profit on a totally rebuilt boat. They disagree with my opinion of this vessel but percussive sounding revealed several areas of hollow soundings suggestive of core separation or delamination. One spot was opened up and it turned out to be much more extensive than percussive soundings indicated as so much new material had been added on top that the soundings were affected.

I strongly suspect that this boat was a total write-off and repair should never have been attempted but I could not trace the history as the HIN/MIC had been removed. I think the repairer got in too deep before he realized what it was going to cost to fix properly. My client wisely walked from the deal after he read my report.



(A). shows an area of filler which the repairer says is not theirs. (B) shows the pinhole pattern typical of Coremat, this is well below the waterline where the manufacturer says there isn't any Coremat. (C) These light grey areas are where the outer skin is separated from the Coremat. So what happened to this boat, was the original lay-up this bad or did many hours of impalement (she had been holed just below the area pictured) and battery cause massive shear stresses which separated the layers. (D) shows that the separation continues upward and outward. How far ? I don't really know and the only way to find out is to keep grinding until you come to the end.



Close up of "D"

Or how about this excerpt from a survey report.....

The two photographs at right show internal and external views of the same area on the starboard side amidships.

On the inside surface a vertical fracture through the laminate runs above and below the hull deck joint.

On the external surface, a repair effectively hides this damage.

See comment (13).



As I said there are honest people refurbishing hurricane boats and there is nothing wrong with this as long as the repairs are well done and there is full disclosure. I am just suggesting that as a buyer you must be even more vigilant than usual. The difficulty in detecting some of these repairs has caused me to decline requests to survey hurricane boats as the liability is not worth the risk. Many of these boats were written off by insurance companies and sold for salvage (scrap). Unfortunately the law does not require disclosure of this fact as it does with used cars.

WARNING !

There is another rather ugly scenario that I have yet to see play out however, I am keeping an eye out for it. Many of these boats came from the gulf coast where sewage treatment plants are of questionable efficiency and few marinas have pumpout stations (those that do exist rarely work) and even fewer boats bother to use their holding tanks. One must also consider the massive pollution of southern water during the last few years of hurricanes. After a boat has taken on a couple of feet of this sweet harbour water in Louisiana, how long before mould and bacteria starts to creep out of those freshly varnished plywood bulkheads ? Combine some sewage with the bacteria in much more

organically active salt water and you could have a very unpleasant brew fermenting in those stringers, bulkheads and teak paneling.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE ?

If the deal is too good to be true.....well it probably is !

Far too often this year the number one recommendation in my survey reports has been.....

“The HIN/MIC is not in the correct format and the purchaser should ensure provenance of the vessel prior to completing purchase.”

or

“HIN/MIC appears to have been changed. Provenance to be ensured prior to completing purchase”

Before you spend dollars for a ticket to Florida or hours driving to Chicago have the vendor send you a photograph of the HIN/MIC if he can't provide one then move on. If he does send one then check out my other article to my other article **“What's a HIN”**.