



# PONTOON & DECK BOAT *Buyer's Guide*

**UPDATED FOR 2024!**







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**VS**



# TOP 10 REASONS TO BUY A PONTOON



**FAMILY FRIENDLY**

**VERSATILE LAYOUTS**



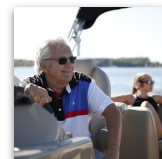
**KID & PET MESS PROOF**

**EASY TO MAINTAIN**



**DURABLE**

**SAFE & EASY TO OPERATE**



**WHEELCHAIR AND STROLLER ACCESSIBLE**

**AFFORDABLE**



**QUIET & FUEL-EFFICIENT MOTORS**

**HIGH PERFORMANCE**



A LOT has changed since Ambrose Weeres, a rural Minnesota farmer, had the notion to strap welded aluminum cylinders to the bottom of a wood deck and slap an outboard motor on the back. That was 1951, and if Mr. Weeres were still alive today he would hardly recognize what his invention has evolved into. What separates a modern pontoon boat from it's ancestors?

**Tube Size**

Pontoons built in the 70's and 80's usually had 17" to 19" diameter tubes. In the 90's, as engines got larger tubes started growing also. Nowadays you won't find new pontoons with tubes less than 23" diameter. The extra space in the tubes means more buoyancy, meaning you can fit more people on your boat and have a larger engine.

**Extra tubes**

Tritoons are more popular than ever! Check out the section "What Makes Tritoons Different from Pontoons?" for more information.

**Marine-grade plywood**

Older pontoon boats were built with plywood that was only treated after the plies are compressed. The decks rotted after a decade and had to be "re-decked". Modern pontoons are built with marine-grade plywood, meaning each individual ply is treated and then compressed with other treated plies to keep water entirely out. Ask if the boat you're buying has marine-grade plywood and check the warranty - reputable manufacturers offer a lifetime warranty on the deck.

**Furniture**

Older pontoons, well, didn't really have furniture. People just used foldout chairs and lawn furniture. Today's pontoons have furniture that rivals your living room, with ergonomic designs, premium material, comfortable padding and built-in cup holders.

**Electronics**

In an increasingly digital world it should be no surprise that pontoons are also loading up with great technology. Options like Bluetooth-compatible radios, satellite-guided GPS and Fish Finder systems, fly-by-wire controls and power bimini tops are becoming regular options on pontoon boats.



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Mansfield, Ohio

# WHAT SIZE OF ENGINE DO I NEED?



**9.9**

**15-30**

**40-70**

**90-115**

**150+**

The smallest engine we recommend for a pontoon is 9.9 HP. A 9.9 HP engine is great for slow cruising, but don't expect to go faster than a 5 MPH. We highly recommend (and include in our prices) a "high-thrust" 9.9 HP engine from Yamaha that has a larger propeller and makes it much easier to maneuver your pontoon boat.

The next size up are engines from 15 to 30 HP, the most popular being 25 HP. You'll get a little more power than a 9.9 HP, but again, these are really designed to slow cruise. You'll want to strongly consider the high-thrust models here as well.

The 40 HP to 70 HP motor range offers higher speeds, but fall short of providing tubing/skiing capability for pontoon boats. They are, however, a great option for groups that enjoy cruising, relaxing and fishing.

Next are 90 to 115 HP outboards and your speed will really start to be affected by the size of your boat. If you have a pontoon boat that's 20' or smaller, you may be able to pull a skier / wakeboarder. If your boat is larger, say 24' or longer, you still may find the speed lacking.

150 HP is the absolute minimum engine size for a tritoon - anything less and the boat simply won't have the performance needed to take advantage of the third tube. 150 HP engines and above are for the boater who wants the power to pull a skier or wakeboarder, or really throw someone around on a tube.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT FUEL

Always use marine grade fuel, and not fuel from a gas station. Why? That fuel from the gas station will have ethanol in it. When ethanol rests in a tank for an extended period without agitation, the ethanol goes through "phase-separation" and will end up with a layer of water on top of your gasoline. It can also loosen sediments within your fuel tank that get sucked into the carburetor and clog your engine.

The good news is that you should be able to find marine grade fuel at your local marina. Charles Mill and Pleasant Hill Marina exclusively offer ethanol-free fuel. Yes, it's more expensive than the gas station. But trust us, a little extra cost is worth saving a major headache.







# HOW ARE TRITOONS DIFFERENT FROM PONTOONS?

**What makes tritoons special? And why are they more expensive than a traditional pontoon?**

“Tritoons” have become a popular alternative to fiberglass ski and speed boats. But take a closer look at that tritoon – there’s a lot more going on than simply adding a third tube.

**What should I look for in the design and build of a tritoon?**

If it’s a quality tritoon, you should see that the middle tube is larger than the outside tubes and hangs lower. This replicates the “V” you find on a traditional ski boat and helps with cornering and stability. You should also see “lifting strakes”, which stick out from the tube on the interior of the boat. Lifting strakes improve the boat’s hydro-dynamics and turning radius. Look up under the deck and you’ll see aluminum under-skin running the length of the boat. This is added to help water from splashing up and slowing the boat down.

**Okay, so what kind of outboard motor should I get for my tritoon?**

Tritoons require larger outboard motors. The smallest outboard motor we recommend for a tritoon is 150 HP. That extra tube adds more weight and more boat to push. Hydraulic steering should come standard on a tritoon. It works the exact same way as it does in your car – it makes turning the wheel so much easier and smoother. We recommend hydraulic steering on any outboard over 115 HP. Other popular options on tritoons include ski tow bars, in-tube storage and more deluxe steering wheels and consoles.

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## DO I NEED A TRAILER?

Are you planning on only using your boat at one lake? If so, a trailer may not be necessary as most marinas offer storage, take-out and put-in services. Trailering does offer you the freedom to take your boat to other lakes, and also allows you to store your boat at home if you choose.

If you decide to trailer your boat, make sure you’re buying the right trailer. The larger the pontoon boat, the more trailer you’ll need. That might mean a second axle, brakes, or a bunk for your tritoon.

We also recommend purchasing load guides (pictured on the right) that help guide the boat on to the trailer, which is useful in currents and in high wind.

At Charles Mill Marina, we’re proud to offer [Hoosier Trailers](#). They’re durable, dependable and built right.



# IS A DECK BOAT RIGHT FOR YOU?

A deck boat might be a great fit for you and your family. There are advantages and disadvantages that you will want to weigh when making a buying decision.

## Advantages of Deck Boats

A deck boat will offer more responsive handling and a tighter turn radius than a tritoon. Deck boats have hydro-dynamic fiberglass hulls that are smoother and have less drag in the water than a tritoon, even a tritoon with aluminum under skin.

Deck boats are also easy to trailer – they are shorter in overall length and height than a tritoon, and use a cradle style trailer, which is typically a little easier than the bunk-style trailers for a tritoon.

Deck boats offer more bang-for-your-buck than a tritoon. Due to material costs, the average deck boat is typically about \$10,000 less than a comparable tritoon, and significantly more affordable than a ski boat.

## Disadvantages of Deck Boats

The biggest disadvantage of deck boats, when compared to pontoons, is space. You will not be able to fit as many people on a deck boat as a similar length pontoon boat.

Deck boats are also not as customizable as pontoons, and often don't have the same number of features available.



**HIGH  
PERFORMANCE**



**EASY TO TRAILER**



**AFFORDABLE**



**STYLISH**





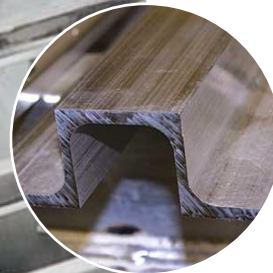
# WHAT'S GOING ON BELOW DECK?



**THROUGH-BOLTED TRANSOM:** Made of up to .190" gauge aluminum and supported with up to 20 stainless bolts to handle today's higher horsepower engines.



**CONSTRUCTED FOR ENDURANCE:** 3/4", 7-ply marine treated plywood through-bolted and screwed to the hat channels to create the strongest seams in the industry. ("Heavy" hat-channel shown).



**HAT-CHANNEL CONSTRUCTION:** It all begins with strength points of .250" (heavy) and .125" (standard) gauge extruded aluminum hat-channels that are 6" wide and secured with 8 bolts spanning our 6" wide deck risers.

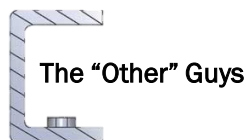
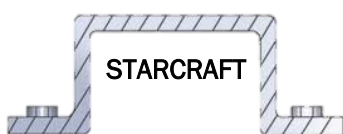


**FENCE & RAILING:** Foam backing prevents rattling and fully welded and anodized railing to add strength. Anodized welds are never painted.



**4-POINT DECK TO HULL FUSION:** Starcraft deck brackets have 4 points of fusion for an extended area of contact with the tube. In addition to providing increased strength and support, this reduces frame twist and racking in rough water and guards against tube fatigue.

Other manufacturers use C-channel designs which can require more cross members and provide less strength than Starcraft's hat-channel construction. And with imbalanced weight distribution, C-channel cross members are less able to withstand the forces exerted on the pontoon year after year.

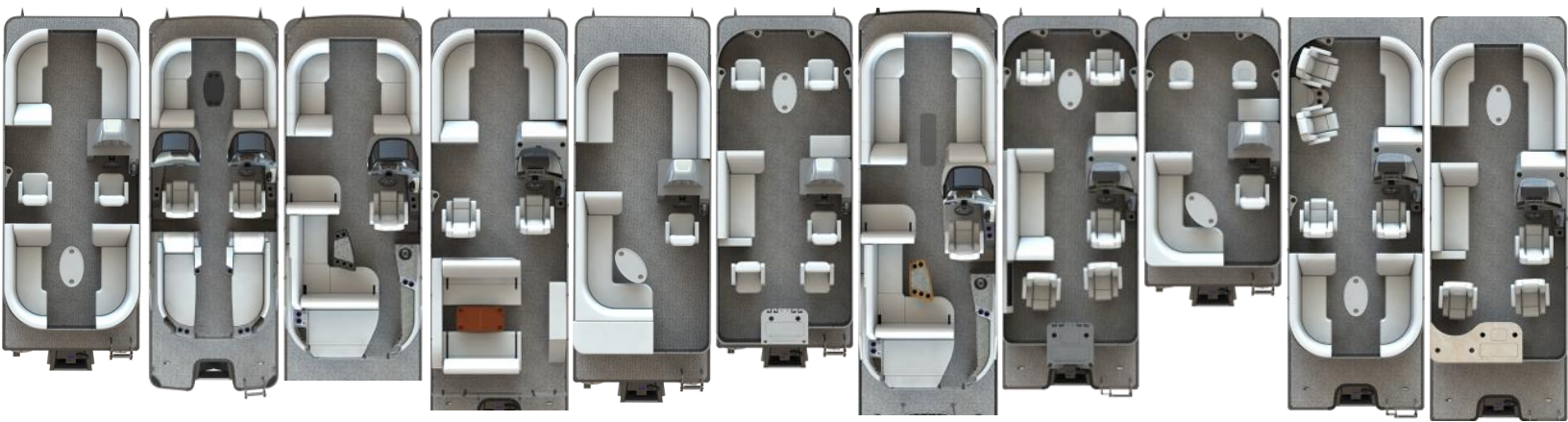


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# WHAT IS THE PERFECT PONTOON BOAT LAYOUT?



There are nearly unlimited ways to configure a pontoon boat. From fishing rigs to tricked-out tritoons, there are so many options it can feel a little overwhelming. Which is the best for you? Here's some insight into some classic pontoon layouts as well as some more modern features.

The **dual console layout** is essentially a cross between a pontoon boat and a fiberglass bowrider. The windshields help both driver and passenger escape the wind, especially on cooler days.



The **"L" layout** is a classic pontoon boat and was once the most common layout. This layout can fit quite a few passengers and the sunpad behind the couch can fit a changing room.



The **rear-facing lounge** is one of the more popular layout features. The key is the reversible backrest which can be adjusted for passengers to face forwards or backwards.



**Fishing stations** are essential to fishing rigs and have everything anglers need – a livewell, rod and tackle holders, even hoses to wash down the deck.



**Fish N Cruise** models offer the best of both worlds – lounges in the front to relax on, and dedicated fishing seats and amenities like livewells and rod lockers for the anglers in the back for anglers.



A **Lanai bench** is a great feature at the back of the boat. It's not legal to use while under power, but it's great place to relax when your group is swimming at the sandbar.







Maximize your space with a **Fold-Up Table** that replaces the privacy enclosure feature. Simply fold down into the seatback when not in use.



Have you ever seen anyone that's *not* happy when they're on a **tube**? We sure haven't – tubing is an adrenaline rush that works for all ages.



We can't explain it, but food just tastes better on the water. A **grill** is just what you need to be head chef on your pontoon boat. Secure it to a railing and let any grease drip into the water

# WHAT ACCESSORIES AND OPTIONS SHOULD I CONSIDER FOR MY PONTOON BOAT?

Dogs love pontoon boats! They have plenty of room to move around and love all of the smells on the water. Just make sure to keep your pooch protected with a **doggie life vest**.



Every lake has a couple of old-timers that always seem to know where the fish are. The rest of us depend on **fish finders** to take us to the fish. Consider upgrading to a unit with GPS and you can mark your favorite spots on the map.



Putting a cover on a boat might be the least enjoyable part of owning a boat. **Individual seat covers** take the stress out and make it much easier to close your boat up after a day on the lake.



# WHAT EXPENSES SHOULD I EXPECT FOR MY PONTOON BOAT?

## Fuel

Smaller 4-stroke outboards sip fuel and a little goes a long way. As engine sizes grow, so does fuel consumption. A 150 HP Yamaha outboard running wide open for an hour will consume about 15 gallons of gas. Pro tip – run your motor at about ¾ throttle for peak fuel efficiency.



## Docking

\$1000 - \$1700

If you choose to dock your boat, your marina will charge a seasonal docking rate which vary by lake. Maybe we're biased, but we happen to think that Charles Mill and Pleasant Hill lakes are the best Ohio has to offer.



## Winterization

\$60 to \$120

If you plan on keeping the boat in Ohio, you have to winterize the outboard motor. This means changing the lower unit oil (which may have water in it that can freeze) and adding fuel stabilizer.



## Oil Changes

\$85 - 125

We recommend changing your oil annually at the same time as winterization. Only 4-stroke motors require oil changes.



## Shrinkwrap and Storage

\$750 to \$950

Most people choose to store their boat with shrinkwrap rather than just the mooring cover? Why? Shrinkwrap is much more durable, especially under the heavy wet snows of Ohio that are known to rip right through a fabric mooring cover.

## Tube Cleaning

\$250 - \$400

Even on the cleanest lakes, you'll find your tubes accumulate a thick layer of "grime" that can slow your boat down (if you care about that), and it can leave a permanent waterline on your pontoons, even if you skip the seasonal tube cleaning just once.





# WHAT'S IN A SAFETY PACKAGE?

## Life Jackets (Type II and III)

You are required by the state of Ohio to have a life jacket (either Type II or Type III) on your boat for every passenger, including babies. Children 10 and Under must wear a life jacket at all times.

## Throwable Floatation Device (Type IV)

A Type IV Throwable is required on board and can be used to throw to a swimmer in distress

## Distress Flag and Whistle

A distress flag and whistle are required by law and can be used to hail other boaters in case your boat needs assistance. Flares are not legally required unless you are on Lake Erie.

## Anchor and Rope Line

We recommend a "fluke" anchor that works equally well in rocky or muddy bottoms. Remember to secure the rope to the boat before throwing the anchor in!

## Marine Fire Extinguisher

Marine fire extinguishers have a useful life of 6-12 years, depending on the model.

## Boat Fenders

There's nothing worse than putting a scratch, or worse, a dent into your new pontoon boat. Strategically place fenders between your boat and the dock (and maybe the boat next to you also) so that they protect the rails from rubbing. Make sure to also get clips that can easily attach and detach the fenders from the railing for easy storage. Don't be a "bumper nerd" and ride all day with your fenders outside the boat!

The rest of these aren't required by law, but we recommend the following:

## Battery Jump Pack

Did you leave the lights on overnight and found your battery dead? A jump pack can be a life saver.

## Telescoping Docking Pole

a.k.a "The Marriage Saver". A good extendable dock pole will save you a lot of headaches during docking. Rather than leaning out of the boat to try and grab the dock, an extendable dock pole makes it much easier to push off or grab a dock.



\*All of the above comes FREE with a new pontoon from Charles Mill Marina

# ANYTHING ELSE I SHOULD GET?



## A Few Other Safety Pointers

### No-Wake Zones

That line of orange and white buoys you see on the lake? That indicated the no-wake zone. Maintain a close to idle speed for the safety of your fellow boaters when you're in a no-wake. A good rule of thumb is to check your wake. Do you see whitecaps coming off? Then you're going too fast.

### Bowriding

No, it's not bringing your crossbow on your pontoon (which come to think of it, you might not want to do either). Bowriding is riding on the very front of the boat, in front of the rail. It's not allowed because if that person should fall off while the boat is under power, they'll be go right between the tubes and into the propeller.



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# THE PONTOON DICTIONARY FROM A TO Z



## ANCHOR

A.k.a that thing you throw in the water to make sure you don't go anywhere. Don't leave dock without it!



## BIMINI TOP

No, it's not a "bikini" top. The bimini top is the canopy that covers a pontoon boat.

## MAXIMUM CAPACITIES

**10 PERSONS OR 1600 LBS**

1800 LBS. PERSONS, GEAR

THIS BOAT COMPLIES WITH U.S. COAST GUARD SAFETY STANDARDS IN EFFECT ON THE DATE OF CERTIFICATION  
MANUFACTURER: SEA RAY BOATS, INC. VANDORE, TN  
MODEL: 220SD  
DESIGN COMPLIANCE WITH NMMA REQUIREMENTS BELOW IS VERIFIED. MFR RESPONSIBLE FOR PRODUCTION CONTROL.  
LOAD CAPACITY - COMPARTMENT VENTILATION

## CAPACITY PLATE

This plate is found right next to the console. It defines the legal maximum number of persons, weight and engine HP that your pontoon can handle. Remember, babies count as people too!



## CONSOLE

Also known as a helm, this is where you'll find the steering wheel, stereo and throttle.



## ENGINE TRIM

"Trimming your engine" means to tilt the motor up and down and is used to control the angle of the boat in the water. Trim the engine up and the front of the boat will rise. Trim the engine down and the front of the boat will fall.



## HOLESHOT

How quickly your boat can get up "on plane". It's pretty simple, the more engine you have, the quicker your holeshot. This is important if you want to pull skiers or wakeboarders.



## KILL SWITCH

The little red cord right near the throttle with the clip on the end. It is used to be able to immediately "kill" the engine if the clip is removed. If your engine turns over but doesn't fire, check to make sure your kill switch is in.



## PROP

A.k.a the propeller. Propellers are either aluminum or stainless steel. We recommend aluminum if you're on an inland lake because they will chip and dent if you hit underwater debris, rather than damaging your lower unit.



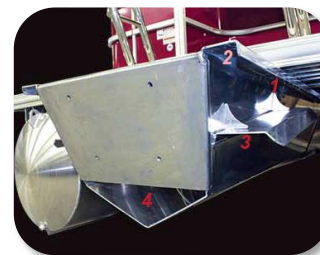
## RUBRAIL

This is a strip of protective rubber or metal that runs around the perimeter of your pontoon right at the deck. It's designed to be the point of contact between your boat and the dock and protect your tubes and panels from damage.



## STEERING CABLE

This is a cable that runs from the engine to the steering wheel and is used to turn the engine. In higher engine sizes (90 HP and above) we recommend hydraulic steering to make it easier on the driver to turn the engine.



## TRANSOM

This is where your motor hangs on the back of the pontoon boat. Transoms are rated for only a certain amount of horsepower, so make sure to check your capacity plate to ensure you're running legally.



## CAMPER ENCLOSURE

A great way to extend the seasonal use on your pontoon, a zipper enclosure is custom-built for your boat to allow you to seal off from the elements.





## WHAT MAKES OUR BOAT BRANDS DIFFERENT?

### FAMILY OWNED

Starcraft, SunChaser, and Qwest are made by family-owned companies, not corporations or private equity firms. That means a lot to us as a family-owned business ourselves, and we know our customers are in trusted hands if any issues would ever arise with the boat.

### FOCUSED ON QUALITY

Our boats are built by boaters, for boaters. You won't find cheap materials, manufacturing shortcuts, or unsafe construction on our boat lines. Our manufacturers take pride in delivering high quality products and consistently rank at the top consumer satisfaction ratings.

### AFFORDABILITY

We believe it shouldn't cost a fortune to buy and maintain a boat. Our manufacturers believe the same thing and build well-made boats at prices that can fit every budget. From entry-level to high-end, you can be sure that you're buying a great boat at a great price.

### TRUSTED & EXPERIENCED

With over 150 years of combined boat manufacturing experience, our boat brands have an extensive track record of building durable and long-lasting boats. These are companies that have become the trusted names in boat manufacturing and will continue to do so well into the future.





**STARCRAFT**  
MARINE

*SunChaser*



*Quest*  
PONTOONS





# WHY BUY FROM CHARLES MILL MARINA

We have been selling and servicing pontoon boats at Charles Mill Marina for over 50 years. We see first-hand the joy of families and friends gathering on the lake to make lifelong memories. Pontoon boating is a uniquely American pastime, and we are proud to be a part of that legacy.

Our commitment to our customers has set us apart from our competition. We treat each customer, each sale and each relationship with the highest level of attention. Our customers are greeted by name, not by the number they may be assigned by larger mega-dealerships.

We sincerely hope to earn your business. We understand that buying a new boat is a major investment of both your time and your money. We pledge to leave high-pressure sales tactics at the door and we will help guide you into what is right for you.



Bob & Andrew Schraedly  
Co-Owners, Charles Mill Marina

