



Buying your first boat.

A practical guide for first-time buyers.





With more first-time buyers committing to a new yacht — often with less experience — what do you need to consider to make the biggest purchase of your life a pleasure?

Mention that you're buying your first yacht and plenty of helpful advisors will warn you of the perils. Buying is an act of commitment with inevitable complications. Rigging, after a time, will demand the expertise of a rigger. The engine, that of an engineer. The electronics, likely a marine electrician. By committing to buy, you're taking on considerable responsibility in exchange for the intangible pleasure of ownership. The payback is experiential – buying your first yacht in the right way can help ensure this rite of passage is a positive experience from the outset. It's supposed to be fun, so ensure you enlist support but start by clarifying what you want and do your own research.

An act of commitment

For a first-time buyer, it's tempting to think the moment of commitment happens when you sign on the dotted line at the dealer. In practice, it starts when you decide to buy a yacht. At that point you should begin thinking carefully about the ownership experience you actually want. Let's run through some of the essential considerations to help you find the right boat,

at the right price, at the right time. Note: This article is geared towards buying your first keelboat. As such, it excludes any discussion of motorboats and sailing dinghies.

Ignore pub 'experts'

There's always a chorus of opinion when you tell people you're buying your first yacht. Some are helpful, some are romantic, and some are simply someone else's decisions repackaged as universal truth. There's always that archetypal bloke at the pub or club who will tell you that you shouldn't do it, you shouldn't buy that, you should buy something else. Quite often, he's coming from a position of his own experience. You need to figure out what your objectives really are. That should always be your starting point. If you start by identifying your own objectives, the rest of the choices begin to organise themselves. Those objectives might evolve, and the experience of owning a yacht will teach you plenty – but that is what a first yacht should do: build confidence, rather than frustration.

Going alone?

One of the options to consider upfront is whether you are interested in syndicate ownership i.e. sharing ownership of the boat with others. This helps with the finances, both the upfront purchase and ongoing maintenance costs, however it will be important that your objectives and those of your partners align. It's vital that all of this is discussed and agreed upfront to prevent problems occurring later on.

RMYS – We're here to support you

As a member of the club, there many fellow members and office staff who would love to help you. We have specifically designed a number of offerings to support first time boat owners e.g. helping build your skills in getting in and out of the marina pen.

Finally, don't think you have to be an expert on everything to do with your boat, you will learn and others will support you. If everyone waited till they knew everything there was to know, no one would end up buying a boat! So read this guide and find out how you can make your dream of boat ownership a reality.



What kind of sailor are you?

Buying your first boat starts with understanding what you want and what you need. While this may seem straightforward, there are a few important questions you should ask yourself. After all, it's dangerously easy to be seduced by the amenities of a luxury cruiser when you really intend to race, or buy a sturdy blue water boat when there's only coastal day tripping in your future.

Define the type of sailor you intend to be (or not be) with the following questions:

1. Where will I sail?

Largely constrained by your geographical location, consider whether you'll spend more time on lakes, coastal waters (e.g. Port Phillip), or ocean/blue water. While there are no hard and fast rules here (sailors have crossed oceans in 18 footers), in general, the further offshore you go, the bigger and tougher boat you'll need.

(note: long term liveaboards are not legal in marinas in Victoria). These two questions will clarify a great deal. Depending on the work you're willing to put in, you can transform a cruiser into a liveboard boat. But transforming that same cruiser into a racer might leave you constrained by structural constants such as the keel type, hull shape, and displacement.

2. How often will I sail (and for how long)?

The reasoning here is simple – longer trips require more tankage (fuel and water) and house power (battery system size). Can you make do without a computer? How about without a shower? The more time you spend in the boat, the more you'll spend on the boat.

5. How comfortable am I working on a boat?

There's an old saying about boats: "Some nail 'em, some sail 'em." Not everyone is cut out to repair fibreglass or install new plumbing. Be realistic and adjust your search accordingly. Even if you have the skills, do you also have the inclination? Without both, skip over the old fixers-uppers (even if they are a really great deal).

3. Who will I sail with?

Solo sailors need less space and less tankage, allowing for a smaller boat overall, but will also benefit inordinately from amenities like furling sails, electrical or mechanical autopilot, and self-tacking jibs. Sailing families require the most space, tankage, and battery power, while crewed sailing generally needs a little more than a solo sailor does – unless you plan to participate in multi-day races.

6. How experienced are you?

An honest assessment of your sailing experience helps determine the appropriate boat size and complexity. New sailors often benefit from simpler systems and smaller boats that build confidence without overwhelming newcomers. Experienced sailors may desire advanced features and larger vessels that challenge their skills.

4. What type of sailing will I do?

Decide at a minimum whether you plan to race and whether you intend to liveboard

Remember that boat systems have become increasingly sophisticated. Modern boats feature complex electrical systems, advanced navigation equipment, and intricate rigging that requires ongoing maintenance and troubleshooting skills.

Choosing the right boat for you

Now that you've got some idea of what kind of sailor you'll be, let's take a look at the different boat types to suit you. There are several considerations here:

- **Type of boat**
- **Length of boat**
- **Hull material and keel shape**
- **Technical specifications**

Boat types

Cruisers. Racers. Liveaboards. These are the basic three categories, the trifecta of sailing vessels. Cruisers prioritise comfort and are equipped for longer journeys. Racers favour performance over luxury. And liveaboards will feature all the conveniences of home, meaning larger tanks, larger batteries, and amenities like showers and large living spaces. Some boats are considered hybrids (racer-cruisers) and most larger cruisers can be adapted to a liveaboard boat without too much hassle.

Cruisers

Cruising boats prioritise comfort, safety, and ease of handling over pure performance. These vessels typically feature spacious interiors, comprehensive galley facilities, comfortable sleeping quarters, and reliable systems for extended time aboard.

Many modern cruising boats offer excellent combinations of performance and comfort, providing generous interior space without sacrificing sailing performance.

Racers

Racing boats emphasise speed, agility, and responsiveness. These vessels feature lightweight construction, powerful sail plans, and minimal interior accommodations to reduce weight and maximise performance potential. These boats typically sacrifice creature comforts for competitive advantage.



Daysailers

Daysailers focus on simple operation and maximum sailing enjoyment for shorter trips. These boats typically feature open cockpits, minimal interior space, and straightforward rigging systems that make them ideal for casual sailing and sailing instruction.

What about catamarans?

The great catamaran versus monohull debate: There is a perennial, (mostly) friendly rivalry between monohull and cat owners in the sailing community.

Multi-hull boats offer unique advantages, including shallow draft, exceptional stability, and spacious deck areas. Catamarans provide comfortable sailing experiences with reduced heeling and impressive interior volume relative to overall length.

Catamarans are stable, spacious, and great for families or liveaboards. They're often referred to, adoringly or contemptuously, as floating condos. There's no doubt that catamarans offer less motion compared to monohulls, but for that same reason many purists often regard their actual sailing experience as somewhat flat (no pun intended). Catamarans are faster, sometimes much faster, than a monohull. But heavy weather or extreme latitudes is out of the question. They're also generally more expensive.

Some monohull owners will transition to a catamaran if they intend to island hop, accommodate a family, or live aboard full time, but few start out on a cat as their first boat.

Ultimately, it's best to spend time on both, through sailing schools or charters, to decide for yourself.

Not all marinas will have pens specifically for multi-hulls, which obviously take up more room, and therefore have higher marina fees. RMYS has dedicated pens for multi-hulls and you will find that our club and other multi-hull owners will be happy to welcome and help you.



Boat length

There are certain “milestones” on the scale of boat length. While the exact inflection points are the subject of some debate, in general:

Up to 24 feet LOA

Up to 24 feet LOA (length overall) most boats are trailerable, keep that limit in mind if towing the boat is an important concern for you. However, with some notable exceptions, taller sailors will find the lack of interior headroom a drawback here.

30 feet in length

Around 30 feet in length, you enter into territory where blue water and liveaboard cruising start becoming feasible for modern sailors (sailors of the past accommodated themselves to much more cramped and narrow boats).

40 feet in length

In the 40-plus feet category, boats really come into their own for couples, families, and longtime liveaboards. Just keep in mind that past 40 feet, some boats begin to feel unmanageable for a single operator, especially without modern conveniences like electric winches, furling sails, and bow thrusters.



24 to 28 feet is a great size for a starter boat – big enough to bring friends and family aboard or accommodate the occasional weekend overnight trip, but small enough to remain manageable, even singlehanded, for the novice sailor.

Finally, bear in mind that a boat’s interior volume does not scale in linear proportion to its length. A boat that is just a few feet longer can often feel quite a bit roomier, so be sure to actually get inside the boat you want to purchase to accurately assess whether the headroom and the size of the head, galley, and sleeping quarters are sufficient for you.



Hull materials

Based on sheer production statistics alone, your first boat is likely to be made of fibreglass. Whether the “classic plastic” of mid-late 20th century boats or the modern vacuum-glassed boats of today, fibreglass dominates the boating industry due to its weight, economy, and versatility. Steel hulls used to be more common, but are slowly fading out as aluminium, its lighter, flashier, more expensive cousin, eats into the expedition and performance boat market.

On your first boat, you shouldn't be too concerned with the choice of hull materials, as your personal preference will ultimately be born of experience. Unless you have some extreme sailing in mind (particularly high or low latitudes), you can't go wrong with any of these materials. Keep in mind that metal boats can become uncomfortably hot in equatorial latitudes without added insulation. If you plan to sail the Asia Pacific or Caribbean, a fibreglass boat may be the better choice. Key differences are summarised in the table below:

Pros and cons of hull material types

Hull	Pros	Cons
Fibreglass	Lightweight	Less impact resistant than metal hulls
	Affordable	Vulnerable to delamination or saturation
	Easy to repair	
	Naturally good sound and thermal insulation	
Steel	Extremely durable	Heavy
	Can be repaired anywhere in the world	Prone to rust without regular repainting
		Poor sound and thermal insulation
		Requires robust electrical isolation
Aluminium	Lightweight	Expensive
	Impact resistant	Vulnerable to galvanic corrosion
	Does not require paint	Poor sound and thermal insulation
		Requires robust electrical isolation

A word on keel shapes

Keels are another topic people love to debate. The main types are full keel (or modified full), fin keels, and bilge keels. Full keels will point like a freight train with great stability on rough seas. But their turning radius is wide, they're slower than other boats, and manoeuvring at low speeds or in tight places like marinas can be challenging. Fin keels trade some of that stability for speed, efficiency, and better upwind sailing performance. They are the

most common keel shape today. Finally, bilge keels are rather unique and found mostly in choppy, tidal areas like the English Channel. They provide good lateral stability and also allow for grounding the boat during low tide.

To make it simple – if you plan on serious blue water sailing, choose a full keel. If you're in UK waters, consider a bilge keel. For everyone else, a fin keel is the way to go.

Getting technical

Here is where sailboatdata.com is your friend. Before you buy, look up your vessel and make note of these key statistics.

Comfort Ratio: A value comparing the "motion comfort" for boats of similar size and type. The higher the ratio, the more comfortable the boat will be in heavy seas and winds. This number is less important for lake and coastal sailors, but absolutely essential for bluewater cruisers.

Capsize Screening Formula: A measure of offshore seaworthiness. This is essentially how hard it is for the boat to tip over. Look for a CSF < 2.0 for ocean passages.

Displacement: The weight of the boat. A heavier boat will generally be more comfortable in rough weather.

Tankage: Check both the water and fuel capacity of the boat. Keep in mind that the average person uses 100-150 litres per day in the residential sector. Since you likely won't be showering daily and running a washing machine aboard your first boat, you can get away with much less. On passage, 4 litres/person/day is the absolute minimum ration. Between 12 and 23 litres/person/day is comfortable.

Engine: By comparing the factory specs to the boat you're looking at, you can tell if the engine has been replaced.

Sail Area to Displacement (S.A./Displ): A measure of performance roughly corresponding to power-to-weight ratio – important for racers.

Hull Speed: Also important for racers, this is the maximum theoretical speed of the boat, limited by the wavelength it creates at its waterline.

S.A. / Displ.:	14.99
Bal. / Displ.:	38.89
Disp. / Len:	366.73
Comfort Ratio:	31.68
Capsize Screening Formula:	1.71
S#:	1.18
Hull Speed:	6.32 kn
Pounds/Inch Immersion:	703.91 pounds/inch

With a Comfort Ratio of 31.68 and a CSF of 1.71, this Cape Dory 28 is ready for some serious bluewater cruising. Image source: sailboatdata.com

Rigging systems

Modern boat rigging systems balance ease of handling with performance requirements. In-mast furling systems simplify sail handling but may compromise sail shape and performance. Traditional slab reefing maintains better sail shape but requires more crew involvement.

Onboard systems

Electrical systems have become increasingly complex, incorporating navigation electronics, autopilots, refrigeration, and entertainment systems. Quality installations require proper circuit protection, adequate charging capacity, and logical system organisation.

Plumbing systems include fresh water, waste management, and through-hull fittings that require regular maintenance. Well-designed systems use quality components and provide easy access for service and repairs.



New vs. used boats

The decision between new and used boats involves weighing immediate costs against long-term value, warranty coverage, and customisation opportunities.

Considerations for used boat purchases

Used boats often provide better value in terms of equipment and features per dollar spent. Previous owners have typically added electronics, safety equipment, and comfort items that would cost thousands when purchased new.

However, used boat purchases require more extensive surveys, potential immediate repairs, and careful evaluation of maintenance history. Hidden problems may not become apparent until after purchase, potentially leading to unexpected expenses.

Advantages of purchasing new boats

New boats offer the latest design improvements, modern systems, and comprehensive warranty coverage. Buyers can customise options, choose preferred layouts, and select equipment packages that match their specific needs. New boat warranties typically cover major systems for several years, providing peace of mind during the critical early ownership period.

Working with established dealers ensures proper commissioning, thorough systems testing, and ongoing support throughout the warranty period. New boat buyers also benefit from established relationships with service departments familiar with their specific vessel.

Choosing a reputable brand

Brand selection significantly impacts long-term satisfaction, resale value, and parts availability. Established manufacturers with strong dealer networks provide better support throughout the ownership experience.

Essential features and equipment

Modern boats incorporate sophisticated systems that require careful evaluation during

the selection process. Understanding key features helps buyers make informed decisions about options and equipment packages.

Buying a new yacht

Ordering processes are better orchestrated than they used to be, but the reality of what arrives is still hand-built, at a relatively small scale compared to a car, for example.

As one sales director, a dealer for Bavaria yachts, who spends his working life meeting buyers at the point where excitement turns into decisions, points out that new yachts are brilliant, but they are not perfect objects delivered into a perfect world. "A boat is hand assembled," he points out. "The sea is a difficult environment. It will not be perfect – right from the beginning. And you've got to go into it understanding that."

Part of that expectation reset is financial. "A \$600,000 boat doesn't buy you a Rolls-Royce, even though it's the same price as one," he says. "People do need to understand that's the reality. If they're looking for a Rolls-Royce experience, then the spend equivalent is quite easily going to be \$3 million for the same length of boat."

Yet this dealer's conclusion isn't that production yachts are somehow inferior – it's that buyers should understand what the category has become.

"The gap between a production-built boat and something truly 'bespoke' is significant," he says. "But the important point is that builders like Bavaria have got to a point where the quality of the production build is really, really good. We offer a great experience in owning a new boat, and it will be a real pleasure because we're well-versed in what we do."

If buying new, consider service/dealer locations for any support or warranty follow-up.



Warranty over brand

First-time buyers spend a lot of energy comparing models and layouts, but the biggest swing factor in early ownership can be logistics: how close the yacht is, what support exists locally, and whether a breakdown will steal the whole weekend.

"If you're local to your boat, and you're half mechanical, then sure, you can buy something older," says the dealer. "You can chip away at it, you can learn, and get people in when you need them, and it can still be rewarding. But if you're travelling for four hours to go sailing at the weekend and something doesn't work,

you're not going to get an engineer at the weekend easily. They're going to be expensive, and you and your family are going to be frustrated. That's when buying a new yacht with a warranty can really make a lot more sense."

That isn't about dismissing older yachts – a well maintained, well proven model can be a great first buy. It's about matching the yacht to the reality of your time. A warranty can be less about 'peace of mind' and more about keeping your first season intact.

Stock boat appeal (ex-display models)

When buying a brand-new yacht there can be an additional risk: the gap between paying a substantial sum of money and receiving the yacht – and how exposing that can feel to a first-time buyer. One solution can be to buy an ‘ex-display’ model closer to home. A stock boat can remove the financial risk that comes with paying a deposit and then waiting.

People don’t always think about it. With a stock boat, you have legal ownership immediately and physical delivery soon. If you’re nervous and want to protect yourself, a stock boat can make a lot more sense.

It also gets around the many assumptions novice buyers can make about unrealistic time frames.

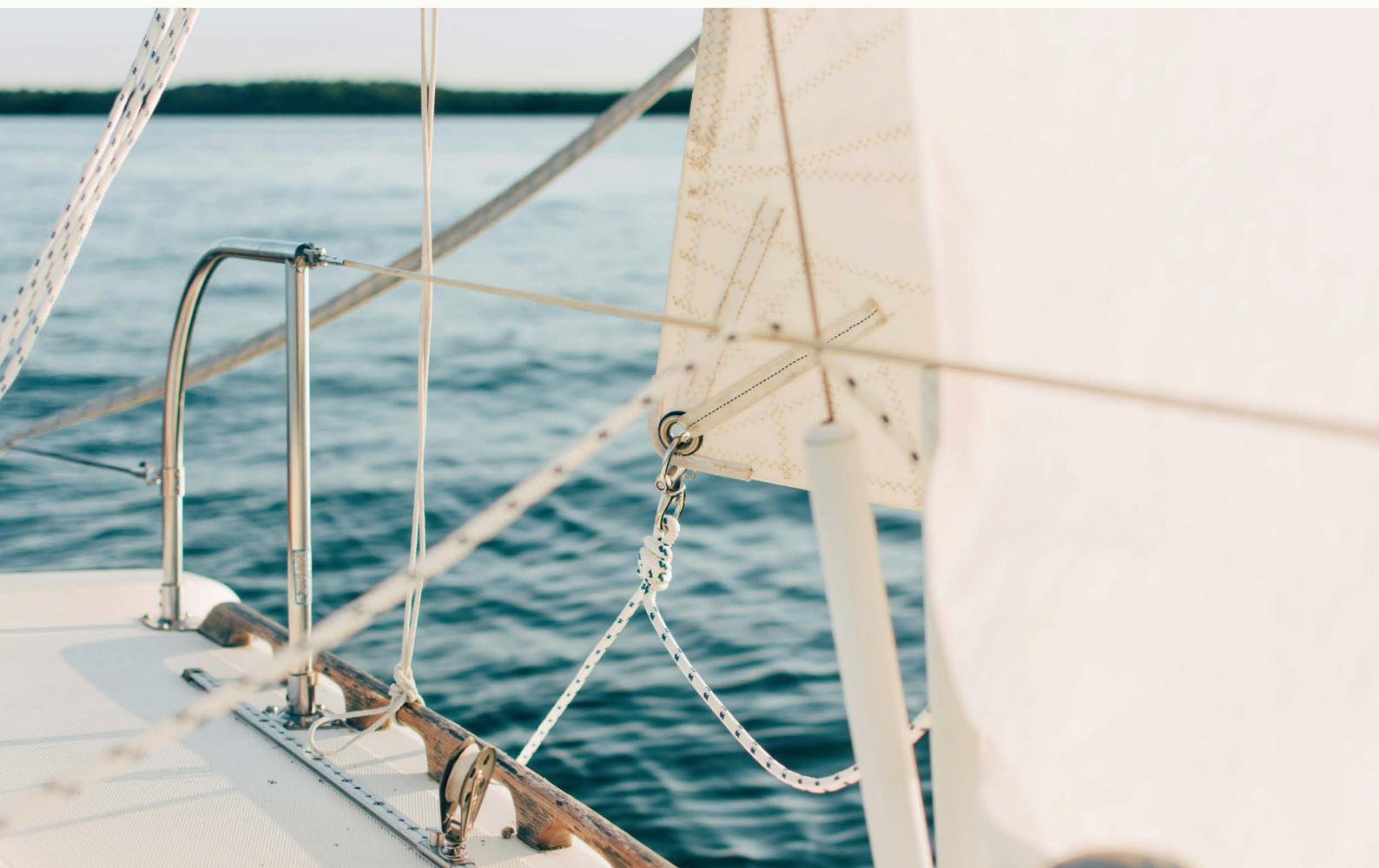
Ordering from a show might be appealing to get the exact specification you’re looking for, but a stock boat will be available much more quickly.

The last phase of delivery can compress quickly: suppliers, commissioning, snagging, scheduling, handover.

The detail matters because first-time buyers can think delays are a sign of something wrong. Often, they are simply a sign of how many moving parts there are in the process between ‘ordered’ and ‘ready to leave the dock’.

New yacht buying can make you feel as though you must decide everything up front. In reality, over-specifying is one of the easiest ways to spend money solving the wrong problem. Later doesn’t have to mean an afterthought. You can even decide when you’re buying the boat that you’re going to add certain things later, so that the yard can put provisions in place – cabling routes, space, access, etc. – so it’s easy to fit the stuff properly when the time comes. But don’t be rushed into over-specifying the boat when you’re not going to use it in the way that you would use it on an ocean crossing.

The aim is not to under-equip the yacht, it’s to keep the first season simple enough that you actually sail, and to keep budget in reserve for upgrades you’ll choose with real knowledge rather than imagined necessity.



Finding your boat

Once you've decided on the type of boat and size of boat you want, it's time to start a short list of potential makes and models that fit the bill.

If you need help making up your mind or determining what boat might suit you, sailing forums and YouTube channels are also great sources of information and inspiration. Spend any amount of time in these haunts and you're sure to pick up on which brands are loved and which are loathed by the community, which boats are legendary, and which boat might be right for your type of sailing.

Research and initial selection

Thorough research helps buyers understand market pricing, available options, and model-specific considerations. Online resources, boat shows, and dealer visits provide valuable information for narrowing choices.

Online searches

Unless you're absolutely dead set on a particular vessel, try not to get tunnel vision on a particular make, model or year. Good deals can often be had if you're flexible. Besides, this is your first boat, and chances are you're still figuring out what you really want. It might realistically take owning a boat (or even two) to precisely hone in on that dream boat.

In forming your shortlist, you're also constrained by availability and location. Here's where online listings can really come in handy, such as [yachthub.com](https://www.yachthub.com) or [boatsales.com.au](https://www.boatsales.com.au).

Use the filters on online listing sites like Yachthub to see what's actually available to you and near your location. You'll probably also discover a few boats you hadn't even considered or knew existed.

Yacht brokers

It's also a good idea to look up the yacht brokerages in your area and browse their inventory. Sometimes these boats aren't listed on the bigger sites. Brokers are often more than happy to chat about your needs and which

potential boats might fit, so don't be shy about making that call. If you are in the market for a newer or more expensive boat, brokers may be the ideal sales channel for an inexperienced buyer and well worth the modest fee.

Facebook Marketplace and similar

In addition to these sources, don't neglect sailing non-specific sites like Facebook Marketplace and similar – especially if you are in the market for a "budget" boat. If you're looking to follow the classic advice, "Go simple, go small, go now," you'll definitely want to scan these humbler online listing sites. However, remember that it is "buyer beware" since there may be a very good reason why the boat appears a bargain. If it looks too good to be true, it probably is! If it's been declared an insurance write off, you're going to find it extremely difficult to even get the boat repaired since almost all yards require insurance.

RMYS

Don't forget to check eBreeze – boats for sale are listed near the bottom of the email each week. While the selection will be limited, there is a certain ease and familiarity that comes from buying offline and local.

Viewing and inspection

Physical inspection reveals details that photos and specifications cannot convey. Experienced buyers examine construction quality, systems installation, and overall condition during initial viewings.

Marine surveys

Independent marine surveys provide a professional assessment of structural condition, systems functionality, and fair market value. Qualified surveyors identify potential problems and estimate repair costs for informed decision-making.

Sea trials

On-water testing provides the most accurate assessment of sailing performance, systems operation, and overall condition. Professional sea trials evaluate engine performance, sailing characteristics, and systems functionality under actual operating conditions.

Ask questions

As you search through online listings, consider each vessel's history. Don't be afraid to send the seller a list of questions. A freshwater-only boat will likely have standing rigging and metal components in much better condition, and with a longer interval before they need service or replacement. Likewise, boats in temperate climates often age better than boats in particularly hot and humid (cold and icy) climates. Has the boat ever run aground or been involved in a collision? Has it been chartered out and if so for how long and for what purpose e.g. racing or cruising? How many hours are on the motor? The answers may not be deal breakers, but it's important to set the record straight so you can accurately forecast the amount of work you'll need to put in.

With a shortlist in hand, you are now ready to refine our choices by perhaps the most salient factor of all: price.



Budgeting and important expenditures

The initial purchase price represents only the beginning of boat ownership costs.

Factor in financing costs if you're not paying cash, as marine loans typically carry different terms than automotive financing. Consider also the cost of safety equipment, electronics upgrades, and personalisation options that aren't included in base pricing (when buying new).

It's extremely important to factor in all the extraneous costs of owning a boat. There is much more to consider than just the purchase price of the vessel. You have factors like insurance, financing, slip fees, club fees, launch and haul out fees, marine surveys, upgrades, and regular maintenance. Ever heard the old joke that "boat" stands for Bust Out Another Thousand? These myriad little costs, which really add up over time, are the reason why. Many experts suggest budgeting 10-15% of the boat's value annually for ongoing costs. Factor these costs into your budget to ensure you're planning for the overall expenditure, not just the vessel.

Insurance

Insurance is legally required to own and operate your boat. Remember, boat insurance isn't just for the vessel itself, but for personal injury and liability resulting from any boating activities. Note that as part of your senior or sailing membership of the club, Australian sailing provides personal injury insurance.

Marine insurance protects against physical damage, liability claims, and other risks associated with boat ownership. Coverage options include agreed value policies that guarantee specific payouts and actual cash value policies that depreciate over time.

Important: Many marinas and sailing clubs will not launch or haul out your vessel if it is uninsured, so make sure you get an insurance quote and approval before purchasing. The last thing you want is to be denied coverage on your new purchase while it sits in a club that won't launch uninsured boats. Your new vessel could be left, quite literally, high and dry. RMYS also has boat insurance to moor your boat in the marina or on a mooring.

Moreover, be aware that many insurance providers will require multiple photos of the entirety of the vessel (including the keel and hull) before approving a policy, and that's only possible when the boat is on the hard

(parked on land). Buying a boat on the hard also allows you and a certified marine surveyor to thoroughly inspect it, which may also be a requisite for insurance coverage – especially for newer boats. Most insurers will require that rigging is renewed at least every 10 years so investigate this during the purchasing process. It's also wise to get a rig survey.

Insurance premiums will vary based on your geographical location and the value of your boat, but it is typically cheaper than car insurance and more than worth the peace of mind. Do yourself a favour and get a quote on any vessel you're serious about before buying. It's easier to properly inspect a boat when it's "on the hard."



Marine surveys

Even for newer boats, you should strongly consider getting a proper marine survey on your prospective purchase. Think of it like a home inspection, but for a boat. In fact, if you dream of living aboard, this is quite literally the case!

Choose a certified Marine Surveyor for the most thorough inspection and report. Some will even let you observe their work, providing a great opportunity to learn what to look for in a boat. The price of marine surveys can vary wildly but expect to spend at least \$35-40 per foot of boat length, plus applicable taxes.

Just a word of warning here. Do not necessarily use a surveyor recommended by a yacht broker – you want one that is going to be extremely thorough and works in your best interests, not the interest of the vendor.

The findings of the survey and the necessary cost of repairs required should then be negotiated as part of the purchase, so once the boat is yours, you can see to the work being done and ensure it is performed to the right quality standard.

Surveyors will typically also stipulate a fair market value for the boat. This allows you to determine if the boat is a good buy or if you should perhaps bargain the price down. The valuation also comes in handy if and when it comes time for you to sell the boat. Don't hesitate to walk away from any seller who refuses to allow a marine survey on their vessel.

Maintenance and Upgrades

A good rule of thumb is to spend 10 to 15 percent of the boat's value in annual maintenance. Of course, an older \$20,000 boat will likely require more maintenance, while a newer \$500,000 vessel should require substantially less (should, not will). But 10 to 15 percent remains a good starting point, so adjust this value up or down based on the boat's vintage, condition, and the results of your marine survey.

It's also a good idea to use the survey (whether official or unofficial) to start a list of potential upgrades you might want to make. When a furling headsail costs upwards of \$4,000 and water makers regularly fetch \$8,000, it's prudent to be realistic about how any planned upgrades will affect your bottom line.

Hull and deck maintenance

Fibreglass hulls require regular cleaning, waxing, and gelcoat maintenance.

Engine service

Marine engines require more frequent service than automotive engines due to harsh operating environments. Regular oil changes, cooling system maintenance, and fuel system care prevent costly repairs and ensure reliable operation.

Rigging inspections

Standing rigging requires regular inspection and eventual replacement to maintain safety margins. Professional riggers can assess wire condition, fitting wear, and overall system integrity. Insurance companies typically specify rigging is replaced every 10 years.

Safety gear

This deserves its own category. Few things marine-rated come cheap, but in a life-threatening situation, the right safety equipment is worth every penny. Don't take a gamble – always sail equipped with the proper safety gear. And it's not just common sense: the proper safety gear is often a requirement to operate a boat, enforced by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Australian Sailing. If you plan to race your boat, you will be required to comply with the relevant Category requirements for that form of race – our club races are Category 6. This includes items such as VHF radios, personal flotation devices (PFDs), pyrotechnics (flares), and horseshoe life buoys.



RMYS marina and club fees

Joining a marina or sailing club is a great way to make friends, race, and of course, find a home for your boat. The difference between marinas and sailing clubs is that marinas are open to all types of boats, including motorboats and small fishing craft. Sailing clubs (a.k.a. yacht clubs) are sailor-specific, with a strong culture to match. The choice is up to you, and it's often dictated by what's in your area. Regardless of your choice, the costs are largely the same:

- Annual membership dues (RMYS does not have a joining fee but if you are currently a sailing member, you will need to upgrade to senior membership as an owner of a boat on the RMYS yacht register). There is also a minimal working bee levy twice a year which is not charged if you volunteer for the club in some way.
- Marina or Mooring fees – RMYS offers both marina and mooring options, however check with the office re: availability in particular of moorings.
 - Marina: the fee charged will be dependent on the length of your boat and there will be a fee for services provided on the marina
 - Moorings: an annual fee plus a servicing fee when your mooring is inspected and any repairs carried out
 - Locker fees: RMYS offers lockers on the marina as an optional extra
 - Dinghy storage: RMYS has dinghy storage available on F Row of the marina
- Boat slipping fee – for pre purchase survey and then subsequently for anti fouling.

Sailing Courses

If you're purchasing a new boat as part of a journey in learning to sail, you should also factor in the cost of education, as sailing courses can quickly become expensive. Contact the RMYS office and speak to our Royal Melbourne Sail Training Academy (RMSTA) to discuss your own circumstances and needs.

As a new boat owner, RMYS is pleased to offer you free lessons and guidance on getting in and out of your pen. Ring RMSTA and discuss your specific needs.

Firstly as the owner of the boat, you will need to study for and obtain your Marine Licence.

Once you pass the test, you need to contact VicRoads to obtain your actual licence (similar to your driving licence).

[Click here to find out more.](#)

The price of your education should also encompass any radio operator courses, navigation courses, and marine first-aid or offshore survival courses you plan to take. Note that in many jurisdictions, a VHF radio license is required to own and operate this essential piece of equipment, so at a minimum, plan to take that.

We have included a table below for you to complete – every purchase is very specific but listing the items is a starting point.

Item	Cost	Comments
Purchase price of yacht		
Marine Survey @ \$40 /ft + tax		Seriously consider a rig survey as well.
Boat Insurance (annual premium)		
Membership fees		You will need to be a senior member of RMYS.
Slipping fees /anti foul		Will be needed for the survey and then subsequently for anti fouling approx. every 2 years.
Marina and mooring fees		RMYS charges based on boat length not the size of pen occupied. There is also a service fee.
License fees		Marine licence.
Sailing courses		Cruising, Navigation, Radio Operator Certificate (Marine), Marine Basic First Aid, Safety, Sea Survival Course.
Running costs		Diesel and other provisioning.
Maintenance		Engine service, hull cleaning, rig inspections.
Safety equipment		Flares, PFDs, Horseshoe Life Buoy, Throw Bag, First Aid Kit.
Total		



Now that we've set a budget and factored in all the extra costs, you might find that your choice of boat needs to change. That is, you might realise the money you can allocate to the boat itself puts you in a more modest price range. And that's perfectly okay. It's better to do your due diligence in regard to all of the above and get a humbler boat than it is to find yourself in a fancier boat without insurance, safety gear, or no money left to actually enjoy it.

As mentioned in the introduction, consider syndicate ownership but ensure you know your partners and can agree on objectives, how the finances are to be managed, etc.

Buying your boat

Now comes the fun part.

Negotiation and closing

Professional dealers should facilitate negotiations while ensuring all parties understand terms and conditions. Proper documentation protects buyers and ensures a clear title transfer. If you're purchasing through a reputable dealer or yacht broker, you can assume all the important information will be on your bill of sale.

If it's a private deal, you can use a simple homemade bill of sale to complete the purchase, but at a minimum, ensure the agreement contains:

- Seller Name
- Buyer Name
- Make, Model, and Year of Vessel
- Hull Identification Number (HIN)

The last number is quite important. It's like a VIN for your boat – a 12-digit unique identifier assigned to the boat for its entire lifetime.

Once the purchase concludes, you will need to register or transfer the vessel registration into your name with VicRoads. Your sail number will be your registration number – contact the RMYS office and they will allocate a number to you and give you a letter to show VicRoads.

Tip: An often-overlooked factor for first-time buyers is which time of year you make your purchase. There are two times when you can snag good deals: in the autumn, after summer season finishes and possibly slipping plus winter storage, and in the spring, before launch and summer storage.

Both periods see sellers keen to let their vessels go before billing periods roll over and they're stuck with another season of mooring or storage fees. In peak summer season, prices will likewise hit their peak as new boaters catch the fever and seek to enter the market.





Handover and support

The first year of ownership can be a steady build of confidence, or a sequence of avoidable frustrations. Which outcome you experience often comes down to the basics: proximity, documentation, and the relationship with whoever supplied the yacht. Keeping it close to your supplying dealer probably makes sense. If something goes wrong, call them in the first year of ownership. Don't disappear off into the sunset and then get angry when you're in a difficult spot.

Don't go too adventurous at the beginning. Look at where the dealers are and where the support is before venturing too far away from them. Build your confidence, then extend your range.

Whatever you do, it's important to enjoy the process. "Above all, it should be fun," says the dealer. "Don't think that across the industry everyone is trying to lift money out of your pocket! Most dealers really don't want the aggravation of selling people extras they don't need. They'd much rather get a great result and you for you to be happy, so you come back in the future."

Start Your Sailing Adventure Today

Purchasing a new boat represents the beginning of countless adventures and memories on the water. By following the guidance in this comprehensive guide, you'll be well-prepared to make informed decisions that result in years of sailing enjoyment.

The key to successful boat ownership lies in choosing the right vessel for your specific needs, working with reputable brokers and dealers/manufacturers, and maintaining your investment through proper care and professional service.



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