



Pre-Launch Check

A boating trip can easily be ruined by overlooking a few minor tasks. The items on the list that follow should be accomplished in the parking lot or the launch preparation area of the launch ramp. Finishing these tasks before backing the boat down the ramp will make launching easier and faster. It will identify the skipper as experienced and courteous.

1. Remove all travel covers, tarps, etc. from the boat. Load all gear, food, clothes, and equipment aboard the boat.
2. Make sure the boat has gas. If not, bring enough money to buy gas while on the water. Check all fluid levels to ensure proper operation. It is a good idea to have spare containers of oil, gear lube, etc. in case you ever have to "top up" your fluid levels.
3. Reconnect the battery cable, or set the battery selector switch to the starting cell.
4. Install and tighten the drain plug.
5. Raise the marine radio antenna, if lowered.
6. Disconnect and stow all stern trailer tie-down straps.

IMPORTANT: Do not disconnect the front trailer strap or safety chain at this time.

7. Disconnect the trailer's taillight/electrical cable from the vehicle. This will prevent the trailer's bulbs from being damaged or shorting out when immersed in cold water.
8. Turn on the engine compartment blower to expel any fuel vapors (on sterndrive and inboard motors). Always smell the engine compartment to insure it is free of fumes before starting the engine.
9. Make ready a bow line and a stern line. Assign a crew member the duty of holding the lines, if the boat is to be held at the dock.
10. Have passengers and crew stay near the boat. When a spot opens up on the launch ramp, everyone can be ready for launching.

Launching

Having finished all of the pre-launch procedures, the boat is now ready to launch. It is best not to be in a hurry. When it comes to launching, "smooth is fast".

1. Slowly back the boat down the ramp until the stern of the vessel is in the water, and until the stern of the boat is afloat. Keep the trailer strap firmly attached to the boat.
2. Put the vehicle in park, engage the safety brake, and place blocks behind the wheels of the vehicle -- this will protect the vehicle from the possibility of the park mechanism failing.
3. If the boat is to be backed off the trailer under power, the skipper should board the boat at this time. If the boat is to be "walked" off the trailer, have a crew member hold the bow and stern lines.
4. If the boat is to be backed off the trailer under power, lower the outdrive and start the engine(s). It's always a good idea to start the boat before taking it off the trailer.

IMPORTANT: visually inspect your engine compartment to ensure proper operation, and that there are no leaks evident in or around the engine compartment.

5. Disconnect the front trailer strap and safety chain.
6. Slowly back the boat further into the water, until it floats free of the trailer.
7. If under power, the boat's engine can now be put in reverse, and backed out. Without power, the boat can be led off the trailer with the bow and stern lines, and made fast to the floating dock.
8. Immediately after launching, drive the tow vehicle and trailer to a designated parking area. It may be advisable to lock the trailer to the hitch, to prevent trailer theft. Make sure you lock your vehicle's doors.
9. Some launching facilities use slings or cables, and have their own launching procedures. Local rules and customs should prevail at all launch facilities.

Trailer



Making sure that your boat is safely and properly loaded and stored on the trailer is very important. Follow these simple steps to ensure a safe trip home!

1. When trailering or storing your boat, it is best to have the battery disconnected and the drain plug removed.
2. Keep a safety chain connected from the trailer to the boat's bow eye-ring. The front trailer strap can break if it becomes worn or sun-damaged. It should be inspected regularly.
3. Secure the stern of the boat to the trailer with strong tie-down straps.
4. It is best to trailer a boat with all canvas tops stowed and secured. This includes the bimini top and mooring cover. Special boat covers are available that are designed to withstand the stress of towing.
5. Make sure the outdrive unit is fully raised, in its towing position.
6. Secure the outdrive unit with a strap or support designed for that purpose. This will alleviate some of the strain caused by bouncing during towing.
7. Keep a spare trailer tire mounted to the frame of the trailer. The spare tire will be useless without a tall jack and proper lug nut wrench. Wheel chocks are also useful.
8. Before towing, check for proper tire pressure and check the axle hubs for proper lubrication (grease).
9. Ensure proper, secure connection of the taillight/electrical cable.
10. Connect a safety chain from the trailer to the vehicle tow hitch. Local laws may require twisting or "basketing" the chain (Saskatchewan does).
11. An improperly weighted trailer may fishtail. Weight distribution of a trailer is affected by how the boat sits on the trailer, whether the trailer is designed to carry that particular boat, the distribution of weight in the boat, and other factors.
12. Make wide turns. The trailer will cut corners.
13. Hard stops may cause the trailer to jackknife.
14. When backing, the rear of the trailer goes in the opposite direction than the rear of the vehicle. Turning the steering wheel to the right (clockwise) causes the trailer to move left. Turning the steering wheel to the left (counterclockwise) causes the trailer to move right.
15. When backing, overcorrecting turns are a major cause of problems. Small movements in the steering wheel are all that is usually needed.
16. Most vehicle manufacturers recommend towing without using the overdrive gear. Consult your vehicle owner's manual.
17. Specific towing regulations vary by province. Contact your local department of motor vehicles for more information.

This series of checklists was prepared with the help of Skipper Bob's Handbook -- for more information on how to find this useful resource, visit www.bfpbooks.com/264.htm

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