

Peter Webster's SECRETS OF BUYING SECONDHAND (P-2)

A combination of a strong Aussie dollar, a weak US greenback and a tired local fibreglass boat building scene, has opened the flood gates for the importation of both new and secondhand boats from various parts of the world into Australia. Boats are coming in, in all shapes and sizes. As a result, prices of secondhand boats are tumbling. In the second leg of this two part series, Editor Peter Webster casts a very experienced and somewhat cynical eye across the marketplace to see if he can help readers find that diamond in the rough - at truly 'bargain basement' pricing.

Engines - Age Shall Not Weary Them . . .

You've found the perfect Haines Hunter V-17C. It's in amazingly good shape, the owner has already replaced the transom, and you've fallen head over heels in love with it. There's only one problem: on the transom is a 105hp Chrysler, circa 1978.

Funnily enough, for all the jokes about Chryslers ("White grenades" or "Let the Force be with you") there were several models of the Chrysler that were very reliable engines. The old Chrysler 55hp and the 105hp in particular, were very good engines, and some of their smaller models, like the 15 and 35, just go on - *and on*.

Like anything mechanical, old engines relate directly to how they have been treated.

You can find old engines, some of them up to 30 years old that are in absolutely mint condition because the owners only ever used them on Lake Eucumbene (read freshwater) 12-15 times a year, and came home, gave the boat a wash and polish, before putting it away undercover in the garage. As a result, the boat's in gorgeous condition 15-20 years later!

These boats do exist. Just recently, a 1978 Haines 19C hardtop was uncovered in Brisbane with a perfect V-4 Johnson on the back, and an original Tinka trailer. The boat had 11 hours on the clock - having been stored under a high-set house in Brisbane all those years. By the time we found out about it, all we could do was join the queue of people lining up to bid for this remarkable boat.

Finding The Rare Gem

Incidents like this are not uncommon - sure, not with such a remarkably low number of hours on the clock, but it is possible to find some of these original classics in wonderful condition and now available for a fraction of their original cost.

But it's like winning Lotto - if you are not in it, you'll never win it. To find the 'hot property' buyers have to do the

hard yards researching and hunting down these gems. Buyers need to trawl through the classified pages, the Trading Post, the local newspapers or have the balls to do what F&B's Darren Shiel has been doing.

Darren drives around the suburbs looking for boats parked on people's front lawn with a lot of grass growing around them. If it's a model he likes, he walks up the driveway, knocks on the door and says "G'day, are you interested in selling your boat?"

And of course, being the devious (big) person that he is, Darren comes across like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, and he's such a nice boy that every mother immediately wants to give him a big hug and reckons that Dad should sell him that old boat on the front lawn anyway!

Using this none too subtle, but extremely successful approach, Mr Shiel is fast becoming the world's number one purveyor of used craft in modern times, mainly because he offers the consumer cash on the spot - a commodity and a tactic that is almost irresistible.

The point is this - the boats are out there to get, but you've got to know exactly what you're looking for, know exactly what they're worth (back to the research in the Trader magazines) and be prepared to negotiate on the spot quickly if you're going to proceed with the transaction.

This is something else Darren has learnt the hard way. "In one case," he told the writer, "I put the offer into the bloke which I thought was pretty crazy, but it was worth a shot - and said I'd ring him the following day to see if he was prepared to accept the offer. The trouble was, I got him thinking about it, didn't I? So he asked his mates at his club that night what they thought about the price - and you

In the perennial quest for real bargains, the Number One Rule is to hunt around for the top brands. Boats like this CruiseCraft are prized because even buyer #5 knows that it has been very well built, will perform extremely well (if set-up correctly) and will retain top resale if looked after.

