



Neil Dunstan

Fix It - Or Replace It?

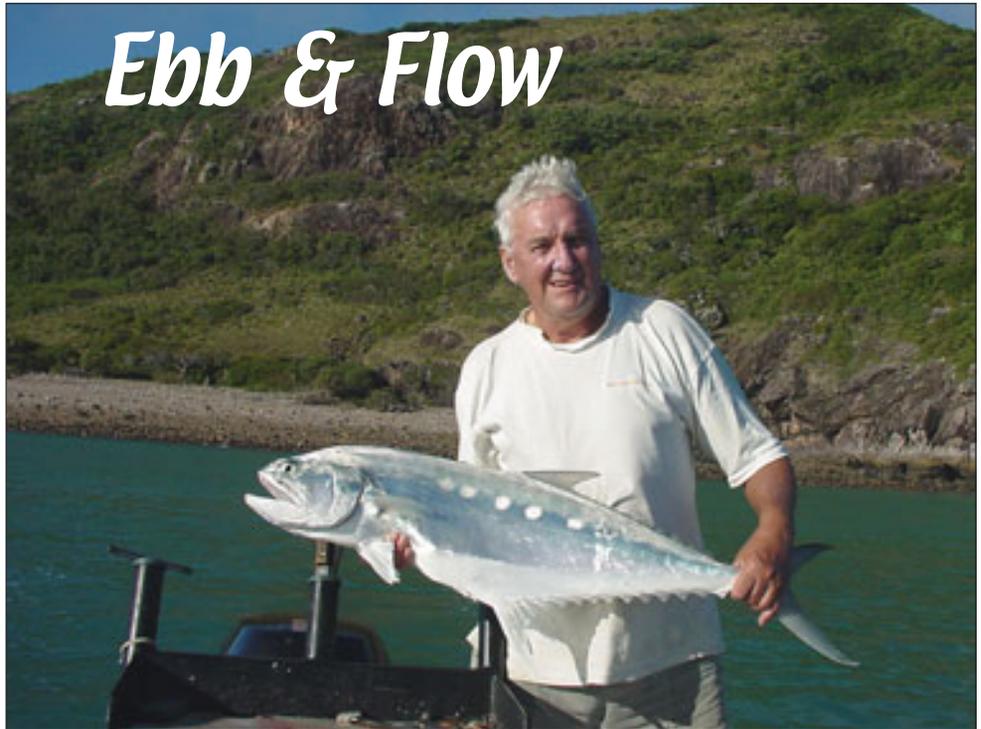
The other day I was talking to our local marine dealer, Mark Lowth from Sarina Marine on the perennial subject: Is it better to fix an old outboard or replace it? Especially from a pensioner's perspective.

After a lot of interesting discussion I suggested that the outcome of this talk would be of great interest to many F&B readers. I prompted him to write it down and let me have a look at it, and suggested if it was good enough, we might be able to use it the magazine.

He duly sent me the following dissertation and commented that it was probably 'rubbish' and he would not be embarrassed if it was ruled 'no good'.

I had a look at what he wrote, and I reckon it is a really interesting viewpoint, written by a man who does this every day.

See what you think:



Fix It Or Replace It?

There is no doubt we live in a throwaway society. Why pay \$150 for somebody to 'have a look' at a three year old DVD player that has decided to stop playing the game two days after the warranty expired, when you can buy a new one for \$250? Most people wouldn't, and neither would I, but does the same thinking apply to your outboard?

From a purely economic point of view eg, repair cost verses the value of the outboard when the repairs have been completed, the answer is usually the same: throw it away, and get a new one.

Now that's all well and good, however, like most things in life, it is not always that simple.

I had a customer come into the shop a while ago with a beautifully presented 17ft Haines with a 1984 120hp V4 Johnson on the back which was being hard to get along with. It was with some regret I had to inform him that the outboard he bought new, serviced once

a year, every year, regardless of the amount of use, for 24 years, had a rather alarming hole in No1 piston. Not good news.

So, as per the above DVD player example, replacement block, replacement crankshaft, re-bore, new pistons, con rods, rings, wrist pins, bearings, gaskets, seals and labour comes to five - six grand. What's the outboard worth once it is rebuilt? Three thousand maximum, and you would have to get the buyer really drunk to get them to even consider paying that much for a 24 year old outboard, rebuilt or not. An easy decision then, give it a cuddle, shed a tear . . . and throw it away.

So with the old John heading for a well earned retirement on the wreck rack out the back of the workshop, we started pricing a new outboard. A brand new 120hp outboard does not come cheap. An oil injected, carbureted 115hp Tohatsu is about the cheapest around. With fitting, you are looking at

One of the difficulties in the 'fix it, or replace it' scenarios is increasingly about the 'thirst' of many of the older engines . . . if a fisho like Neil is planning to do several hundred hours a year under power - he could save the cost of the new four stroke just in the fuel savings compared to a veteran 2-stroke, albeit one that is as 'good as new'.

about \$12,700.

Not an insignificant amount of the folding stuff. Put it on the back of a 24 year old boat and trailer package, good condition or not, and what have you got, and more to the point, what's the whole boat, motor and trailer package now worth?

Taking into account the number of good second hand boats on the market at the moment courtesy of the dreaded GFC, you would be lucky to get 14 grand. I am no accountant, but that seems to me to be a rather poor return on investment.

What to do? Either way, you as the customer are

the person who has to pay the money regardless of which option you take. Not the repairer or dealer, so if you ever find yourself in an unpleasant situation like this one, think it through, shop around and don't be afraid to get a second opinion.

It is a fact of life in the marine industry, (and others), that we are all in it to make money, (sorry, but my little boy needs shoes). That is the bottom line. A business with a large retail section which sell a lot of outboards (and therefore receive great big bulk discounts from engine manufactures) will generally want to sell you a new one as opposed to fix the old one, because there is more money in it, and the turn around time is super quick with very little in the way of labour costs.

On the other side of the coin, a business like mine, which is predominantly a workshop, will make more out of rebuilding your 120hp engine than selling you a new one.

Take into account who you are dealing with, what type of business they have, and realise that the advice you are being given may not be the best option for you personally. Not because your dealer or repairer is inherently evil, or trying to rip you off, it is simply a case of we like to



At the end of the day though - it still comes down to how much you can afford - and a rebuilt engine beats not going at all, hands down !

eat too, and when the phone rings and it is someone looking for the accounts payable person, it can be hard to be totally unbiased in the advice you give.

I personally sleep marginally better knowing I have been totally honest, than when I am being threatened with a debt collector, but sometimes, the line between the two can be very thin.

So what did Mr. 17ft Haines decide to do? "Rebuild it, son," he said. "I can afford 5 to 6 grand, I can't afford 12 to 15 grand, and if I get another 24 years of trouble free operation out of this power head, it will dead set see

me out."

So we did. He's happy, I'm happy, and Jacob has a new pair of shoes. (Not that the little bugger wants to wear them).

Remember, this option was the best for this customer, it may not be the best option for you. The point is this. Don't automatically think replacement is the only option, take into account your needs, not your wants. Everybody loves turning up to the local boat ramp with a shiny new outboard on the back of the boat, and hey, if you can afford it, go for it. But if money is an issue, fixing it may well be a smarter option.

Fix it or replace it? It depends. It depends on you and your personal position, your personal wants and needs, and your plans for the future. Am I going to keep this boat for life, or will I be selling it in the future? These are things that need to be taken into account when making your decision.

It is not for me, or anyone else to decide which way you should go. It is you, and you alone.

Mark Lowth, Sarina Marine.
Shop 3, Cnr Sarina Beach Rd & Patch St Sarina Qld
Ph: 49 43 2274
Fax: 49432271
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