

**WHATEVER FLOATS YOUR BOAT PROBABLY COSTS TOO
MUCH
07/25/00**

A boat is a hole in the water where you put your money. How true is that and how often I am reminded of it when I see the annual parade of boats and trailers checkering the area highways!

Most, to me, look like ostentatious objects whose main benefit is to impress rather than perform. They are obviously very expensive toys, which assures the same may be said for their storage and maintenance.

My experience in much more modest craft has left me not with feelings of envy for owners seen hauling them about, but empathy.

I have five boats and three motors at the present time. Four of the five boats and all three motors have been gifts. I have enjoyed them all on a very limited basis with the exception of just one, which I bought six years ago and have never used.

Granted, it was a Wal Mart inflatable vinyl boat that cost \$60. I bought it to fish remote ponds, another of many pipe dreams that never happened. It has given me great joy, however, to watch my son-in-law push the grandsons around in it in the shallows in search of water denizens.

A 1992 aluminum party barge with a 30-horse engine is the flagship of my fleet. A retirement gift, it is relatively maintenance free and requires only two short trailer trips a year. I would highly recommend one to anyone on the water.

The most versatile boat is an original Grumman Sport Pal canoe. It, too, was a gift from an old friend and came about in a most unusual way.

He was retiring from the area and asked me if I would be interested in having his boat. All he told me was that it was aluminum and was locked up down at a boat landing and had not been used in years.

He gave me the key and told me it would fit the lock on his boat. There were at least eight locked aluminum boats and, quite naturally, I started with the poorest and worked on up. The frosting on the cake was a three-horse Johnson motor and a pair of new guide boat oars he threw in. I use it every chance I get.

My good wife bought me an inflatable float tube boat I have used just once. It is light, has a pair of oars, and handles well. It would be real handy to fish remote water if I could find the time.

I have known many people over the years who maintained an expensive boat and trailer that never made it to the water more than once or twice a year. A farmer friend of mine was a typical example. He never had any spare time and was lucky to get the family to a nearby lake more than twice a year. When he calculated the costs he sold the boat and trailer and rented a boat at the lake.

When I stop and think about it, my best days on the water were spent in what might be called nondescript craft. A homemade basswood scow or duck boat provided me with many happy hours of fishing, hunting and trapping.

Every fall it was put up on sawhorses and painted and caulked. It was either rowed or poled depending on whether I was traversing open water or swamp. The present day johnboat of maintenance free aluminum has made my old boat obsolete, but it can never duplicate for me the pleasures the old boat and youth provided.

Nearly all of us have run progression up and down the boat line. Most become disenchanted, but fortunately for the industry, many are hooked for life. Not so a good friend, who summed up the feelings of many who moved on to other things.

He fondly recalled the sleek beauty with the bright metallic finish and the powerful motor that attracted a bevy of welcome young ladies. It also garnered plenty of freeloading friends who soon would wear out their welcome.

Tiring of the expense and hassle, he sold the boat. His summation of the situation was fitting for many of my own debacles:

“The day I bought it and the day I sold it were two of the happiest in my life.”