

# boats, etc.

**T**here exist those souls who claim the biggest barrier to waterskiing remains those 20 extra pounds, a pronounced lack of balance and a distinct inability to use their shoulder “muscles” for anything more strenuous than waving. Granted, an exercise regime change may be in order for some hardcore aqua-shredding, but the integral piece of fun in the sun (and water) remains a boat — and a big one.

If you have ever set foot in a boat shop, you know that watercraft are serious business. Boats are now financed much like cars. In fact, some cost as much as a luxury car with all the bells and whistles.

If you are going to take the plunge and drop \$8,500 for a used entry-level ski boat or shell out \$17,000 to \$20,000 for a nice family deck boat, you first need to make sure you'll use the darn thing at least once a week.

Beyond that are several factors to think about before you pop for a new or used boat. So as we always say, do your homework — and lots of it — before you sign on the dotted line. Here are some of the things you need to understand before you go shopping:

**Horsepower** — My family's first craft was not pretty — a buckety, short boat with a whopping 60-horsepower engine. If it was windy or there were more than two adults in the thing, getting up

**YOU CAN REACH A ZEN-LIKE PEACE AS YOU TAKE TO A GLASS-SMOOTH BODY OF WATER NEAR YOU** **BY MARK LUCE**

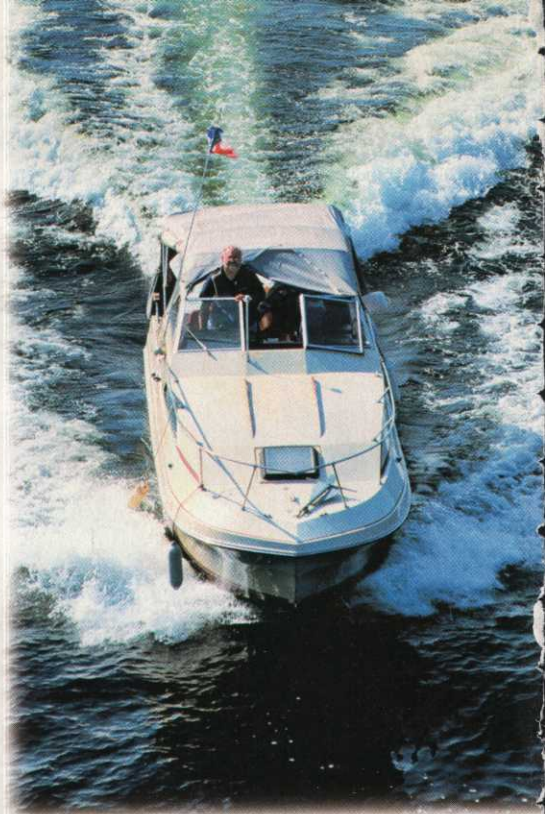
on the skis was tough. For better results, you need to have at least 125 hp to get the job done.

**Seating** — Boats with bow seating are better because the spray provides a nice cool-down. Look for boats at a length of 18 feet to 20 feet, which can hold five normal-sized adults comfortably without giving up too much power.

**Safety** — You won't drink and drive in a car, so why would you drink and drive in a boat? Beyond this no-brainer, everyone on your boat needs to have a life jacket.

**Hauling/storage** — It takes a truck to haul your big boat, but there are alternatives. You can often rent a slip at the local marina, sometimes for year-round storage. This will run between \$100 and \$125 per month.

Barring the bankroll to dive into your own boat, there is another option — make friends with someone who loves to water ski. My softball buddy Randy loves anything related to the water and takes his boat out at least three times a week in season. Guest



spots are frequent. Sure, there's a short wait to have your pull around the lake. And as Randy says, “The boat runs on gas, not thanks.” A guest on any boat needs to offer to spring for fuel, food and drinks.

I can't ski like I once did, as the first paragraph physical afflictions seem to adversely effect my now 33-year-old torso.

But as contradictory as it sounds, there exists a zen-like peace in being yanked around behind a roaring boat. Sure, you're technically tethered, but there's freedom of movement, communion with the water, the rush of speed, and sheer simplicity of that “thwapt, thwapt, thwapt” rhythm of the skis as you glide across glass-smooth water on a lazy summer day.

At least until you wipe out.

*Mark Luce, a free-lance writer based in Kansas City, Mo., can't slalom worth a damn anymore after returning to the landlocked Great Plains.*

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