

Tips before hitting the water

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

Memorial Day weekend signifies a number of different things to different people. At the top of the list is a day to remember all of our fallen soldiers and service members who gave their lives so we could enjoy our freedom in this great country.

Memorial Day is also the unofficial-kickoff to summer, as well as the summer boating season. Boaters who regularly use their watercraft for fishing or early season water activities may have already been on the water, but for some Upstate residents, this weekend might be the first time they've been on the water since last summer.

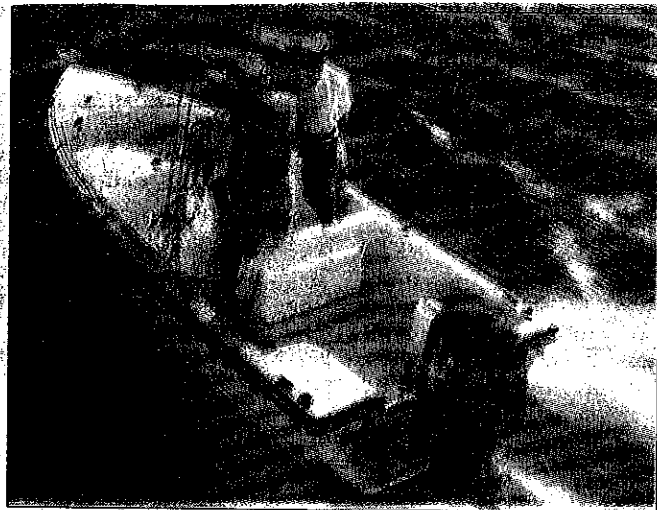
In order to have more time enjoying the water and less time — or no time — on the side of the road or tied up to the dock, here are some tips and suggestions before you hit the water this holiday weekend.

A little preventative marine maintenance goes a long way, and that starts with batteries, a fuel system and trailer gear. Before you put your boat on the ramp to see if it will start, try cranking the motor at home using a pair of water muffs or other water-hose connection.

Fuel-system cleaners may not be able to repair damage caused by gasoline storage over the winter — especially if that gasoline contains ethanol — but can help clean up the gas that's in there and help your carburetor run cleaner.

Another overlooked maintenance item is battery power. Don't assume a battery that was fully charged last summer will retain that charge. You can charge the battery on an inexpensive at-home charger. If it's out of date or won't hold a charge, consider replacing your marine batteries.

If you have not done so this season, check and



COURTESY OF KEY WEST BOATS

Many Upstate residents choose to celebrate Memorial Day on the water. Safety precautions and a little preventative maintenance can go a long way to enjoying a boating weekend.

grease the bearings on your boat trailer, which requires more frequent service than utility trailers that are not submerged in the water. In addition to wheel bearings, also check to make sure your trailer lights are in working order. Once you get to the water, courtesy at the boat ramp means having a boat ready to go that will start so you can move your vehicle and watercraft off the ramp in a timely manner. Make sure you have at least two people who are familiar with backing the trailer into the water and moving the boat off the trailer and out to the courtesy dock in a timely manner. Load gear into the boat beforehand and have passengers waiting away from the launch area.

Speaking of passengers, boating laws require that each vessel have an approved life preserver of appropriate size and rating for every occupant of the vessel. In addition, boats more than 16 feet in length must carry an approved throwable device.

All vessels less than 26 feet in length with an attached gas tank must also have a Coast Guard-approved handheld, portable fire extinguisher on board. Additionally, all boats less than 39.5 feet must carry an efficient sound-producing device

such as a bell, whistle or horn. Each person on a personal watercraft must wear a Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, III or V personal flotation device. A personal watercraft may not be operated between sunset and sunrise and must be equipped with a self-circling or lanyard-type engine cutoff switch.

Cut-off or kill switches are not required for use in South Carolina on other watercraft, but are strongly recommended to be used by the operator of the watercraft while the boat is under power.

Finally, enjoying the holiday for many boaters means consuming alcohol. Open containers of alcohol are permitted for all but the operator of the vessel, and operating the vessel under the influence of drugs or alcohol is against the law. A full listing of boating and safety requirements can be found on the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources website at dnr.sc.gov/boating/safety.html

Be safe. Enjoy the holiday, and happy boating.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of the "Upstate Outdoors" broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM. This week's guest on the show will be Chris Wood, president and CEO of Trout Unlimited.