

There's no such thing as a "free" boat

Have you ever heard of a "free" boat? You can't have, because they don't exist. Sure, someone can give you a boat and you may not pay any money for it, but that is where the "free" part ends. I'll give you an example.

My sister Janet and her husband Don lived on a lake in the Minneapolis area. They had a deck boat that had served them well for a number of years, but in those years it had been sunk a couple of times. By sunk I mean it was resting on the bottom of the lake, at their dock.

Twice while they were out of town, the boat had been tied to the dock and filled up with water from severe rainstorms, sinking right to the bottom. After the first time, they hauled it out, took it to the repair shop, and had them go through the motor and refurbish the interior. When it happened the second time they decided perhaps it was time to buy a new boat.

The boat dealer had no interest in taking their old boat in trade. After all, if it wasn't worth it to them to fix, why should it be worth anything in trade? Good question. Well, to make a long story short, they asked me if I knew anyone that would want a "free" boat?

I am always up for a bargain, so I said, "sure, I'll take it"! That was the beginning of the resurrection of a boat we refer to as "the Titanic".

The first thing I had to do was get a trailer hitch put on my vehicle. At that time I owned a blazer SUV. A trailer hitch for it cost \$300.00 installed. Second on the list was getting the motor to run.

My knowledge of motors is not quite as good as my knowledge of my own opinion, at which I am an authority. I do know that outboard motors work best when only the bottom half is in the water. As this one had been totally submerged twice, I figured some WD-40 was needed to displace some of the moisture inside the engine. I removed the spark plugs and sprayed a generous amount of this magical substance into the engine. Then I just let it sit for a few weeks.

In the meantime I had charged the battery to make sure I had some cranking power when I attempted to turn it over. My next move was to go buy new spark plugs, thus eliminating bad plugs as a reason for failure to run. They were about \$4.00 apiece, times six.

After letting it rest and self-lubricate with my injection of WD-40, I decided it was time to turn it over, or at least try. I hooked up the battery, hooked up a can of fresh gas to the line, (another \$10.00). As I sat down into the captains seat I crossed my fingers and said a little prayer.

Turning the key gently, much to my surprise, the engine actually turned over. It didn't start, heck it didn't even fire, but at least it turned over. Hope sprung eternal. After several attempts at starting it all I could do was get it to turn over. I mean several attempts daily for several days. Each time I would try it I thought perhaps this was the day it would start.

Finally I decided that the Titanic needed someone with more expertise in outboard motor repair than I. My search for an inexpensive mechanic began. After all, I wasn't even sure the thing would ever run, I didn't want to spend a lot just to find out it was junk.

I called a guy that had advertised in the daily paper in the trades and services section. His ad indicated that he worked on all small engines. When I talked to him on the phone he told me it would cost about \$100.00 to check out the motor and determine if it would ever run or not. Sounded reasonable to me.

I hooked the boat up to my new \$300.00 trailer hitch and proceeded to haul the boat out to the repair shop. Since it was still wintertime I figured I would have it back in no time at all. The mechanic said it would be about six weeks.

Have you ever noticed that when you take a boat in for repair they always tell you it will be about six weeks? I don't care if you're just bringing it in for a tune-up or major overhaul. Six weeks.

Well, after six weeks I still hadn't heard anything so I called the repair shop to see if they had found anything. Imagine this, they had just worked on it the day before I called. The good news was, they got it to start. The bad news was, they had to put carburetor kits in it. Lets see now, three carburetors times \$100.00.

When I picked up the boat he asked me if I would like to hear it run. I was like a kid waiting to see Santa, you bet I wanted to hear it run.

The mechanic hooked up the water hose and flapper to the motor to provide water to cool the engine while running on dry land. He climbed up into the boat, turned the key, and instantly the motor started up. On its best day when my sister had owned the boat it had never started that easily. I was grinning from ear to ear. Then the mechanic gave me the bad news...

It seems that being submerged under water is not only bad for motors. It's not so good for hulls either. He took me to the back of the boat and stepped on the bottom of the motor, putting a little weight on it he could make the transom move back and forth easily.

He told me that if I took this boat out on the water and gave it too much gas, it might fall right off the transom because it was so weak. My knees started to give way. I was thinking of calling my insurance man to see if my new boat was covered by fire insurance.

Instead, I called my insurance man and asked him if he knew anybody that fixed transoms. Greg, my insurance man, knew a lot about boats, I figured if anyone would know, he would.

Greg suggested this guy that had worked on lots of fiberglass boats that he knew of so I called him to see how much it would cost to have it repaired, if it could even be repaired. He said to bring it up and he would take a look at it. Once again, I hooked it up to my \$300.00 hitch and proceed towards the body shop.

When I got there, this nice, elderly, gentleman came out and looked over the boat. He stepped on the motor, rocked it back and forth, and said “this isn’t so bad, I fixed one worse than this last week”. I didn’t dare smile yet I had to ask him how much it would cost. “How much” I said. “Well” he said, “it should run about \$350.00”. “How long” I asked? “About six weeks” he said.

I picked the boat up six weeks later and the total cost was about \$400.00. Once again I dared to smile, knowing that now my boat was water ready.

As you all know, a boat is never completely ready.

I had to buy a new gas tank, I added a fish locator, a trolling motor, life jackets, etc. etc. When someone tells you about their “free” boat, you know better. There is no such thing as a “free” boat.