

Rough Water-

By Spencer Berman, Field Editor

When most anglers get a new boat, they spend hours loading and organizing their gear before washing and waxing it to make sure it looks great when it hits the water. However, almost nobody asks themselves whether they have prepped their boat for everything Mother Nature has in store for it.

Most boat companies will tell you their boats are perfect just the way they are, and some are more correct than others. But none are 100 percent ready to take the serious beatings of rough waves. In the time I have spent fishing big water, I have seen nearly everything on a boat break. As each instance happens, I add to my list of what can be done to a boat to make it ready to handle the roughest water musky country will throw at it. This allows me to prevent potential boat problems before they happen and keeps me on the water.

My checklist has grown to over 120 steps of boat preparation which I do every season when I get my new rig. I average around 220 days on the water per year, and my list has enabled me to lose less than four days of guiding because of boat repairs in the last six years. If you apply these concepts to your boat, you will not only reduce the number of problems you have but you will be able to spend more of your time focused on fishing.

Boat Assembly

Fishing boats are built out of either fiberglass or aluminum, and both materials make for good boat hulls. Fiberglass is heavier and a touch more expensive, but the weight helps the boat run through larger waves with less impact. Aluminum tends to be less expensive and can bump into rocks and other things without serious damage.

Still, both materials have several shortfalls when it comes to boat rigging. First and foremost, both of these materials are horrible at holding screws, which will back out over time. Add to that the constant rattling of the hull in rough water and your screws will constantly rattle free. So, the first thing I do when I get a new boat each season is locate all the screws and change them to bolts, if possible. To do this you must have access to the underside of the bolt, often through the use of

access panels. I anchor all bolts with two large washers, a locking washer and a lock nut. I add a product like Loctite Thread Locker High Strength to each bolt threading before I secure it. This process will pretty much ensure that none of these bolts will come loose unless you do so yourself.

Although exchanging screws for bolts will serve to make these connections much more permanent and rattle-free, this only applies to where you have access to the top and bottom of a screw. There are many more areas on a boat where you won't have access to the back of a screw and can therefore not exchange it for a bolt, since you wouldn't be able to tighten the nut on the other end. In this situation there are a couple things you can do to make sure the screw will stay secure.

First, make sure the screw being used has a low thread count (meaning the threads are more aggressive and spaced farther apart to increase bite). If needed, switch out the screw for a stainless steel, more aggressive screw that will allow for a better grip. Next, I add a small lock washer at the head of the screw to keep it from rattling free. Lastly, before you replace the screw, always add a product like Loctite, which will further lock the screw to the aluminum or fiberglass.

I then repeat this process with nearly every screw I can find, paying special attention to areas I have had issues with in the past. When it comes to things like access panels and other areas that you might need to get into from time to time, it is important to note that even with Loctite and a lock washer on the screws you will be able to loosen any of them with a little effort.

Despite this prep work it is still a good idea to go through your boat with a screwdriver every so often to make sure everything is tight.

Trolling Motors

Your trolling motor is one of the most important pieces of equipment on your boat, yet many anglers put more thought into sharpening their hooks. First, no matter what trolling motor you have, it should always be mounted on a quick-plate and not to the boat itself. Most quick-plates cost less than \$75 and when something goes wrong you will be extremely grate-

Proof Your Boat

Advance prep goes a long way when the wind is blowing and muskies are biting



Sometimes you need to go fishing when the weather is uncomfortable if you want to catch a 53-incher like the one held by author Spencer Berman. Make sure your boat is ready for it.



Other Boat Prep Ideas

When you combine wind with big water, things are bound to get hairy. The following is a list of other ways in which you can better prepare your boat:

- Make sure batteries are securely fastened.
- Be sure your gas tank is secured properly so it doesn't shift in rough water, causing it to kink the fuel line.
- Be sure steering lines are secured tightly.
- Tighten all housings around the windshields.
- Make sure all compartment latches are set to be extremely snug when shut so they won't leak when water hits the deck.
- Caulk or add sealer to any place where the glove box or any other compartment may leak.
- Reinforce all rod holder mounts.
- Make sure all wires on the trailer are pinned up and won't drag and catch things on the ramp.

- Drill holes to allow water to drain out of any compartment needed. Also you can drill them the appropriate size to use a plug in them when drainage isn't wanted.
- Add glow strips to trolling motor head.
- Be sure trailer ratchet straps are secure. Often they are loose so they will more easily move side to side, however this can cause them to loosen more and fall off. Be sure they are locked at the proper angle.
- Add lock washers on bolts holding the graph to graph mount.
- Tighten all screws inside your trolling motor plug.
- Add a stick-on tape measure inside of the live well for quick measurements.
- Ensure all wiring in the boat is secured properly. Zip-tie anything that is hanging unsecured.

— Spencer Berman

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ful you have one. A quick-plate will allow you to remove your trolling motor quickly and easily if it breaks or needs service. All you need to do is unfasten the lock and pin and your trolling motor will slide right off the plate. If you screw your trolling motor to the boat it will be extremely time-consuming to get it off, in addition to being necessary to screw another one to the boat in order to get back on the water.

Quick-plates are fantastic in concept, but they require a bit of alteration to make them truly solid for rough water. First, if your quick-plate comes with screws, DO NOT use them. Screws and boats don't mix. You should get stainless steel bolts with the biggest washers that will fit, and then seal them with lock washers and a locking nut. I add Loctite to the bolts before I secure them.

Another quick-plate alteration to keep in mind is the number of bolts you use. Most quick-plates come with only four bolts to secure them. This means if any one of the four bolts becomes loose the whole bracket will start to wobble, which not only makes the trolling motor louder and less effective, but the added wobbling will speed up the loosening of the other bolts. For that reason I normally drill two more holes in my quick-plate and add two more bolts. If you look at how the top and bottom pieces of the quick-plates

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fit together, it is normally very easy to find a good location to add the bolts and not interfere with the function of the bracket.

Lastly, if your boat's trolling motor deck is not beefy enough to handle the torque of the trolling motor, it is normally a good idea to use a piece of starboard (marine plywood) as backing to the deck so your connections have extra strength. I have seen powerful trolling motors pull tiny bolts, washers and nuts through the hull of the boat when not reinforced properly.

The last alteration for your trolling motor is to add a Ram Mount trolling motor bracket to the head of the trolling motor shaft. In rough water, long shafted trolling motors will bounce up and down, often hitting the gunnel of the boat. Also trolling motors are notorious for randomly deploying in rough water, which may shatter the shaft. Luckily Ram offers an easy-to-install Trolling Motor Stabilizer Mount that solves these problems by securing your trolling motor head when it's not in use.

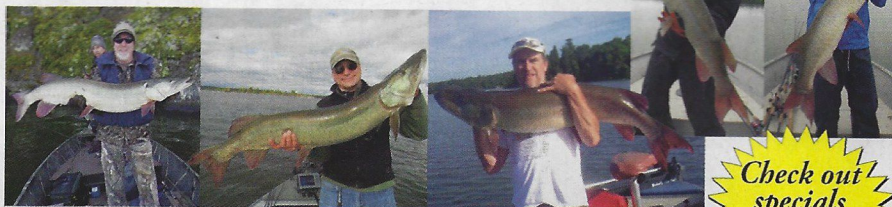
Graph Mounts

In the last 10 years or so, the sophistication of electronics is unparalleled. Likewise, the size and weight of the graphs have increased. Such added weight makes it difficult to secure them so they don't bounce around in rough water. Anyone

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Rough Water-Proof Your Boat

who has ever been in three-plus-foot waves with basic graph mounts can tell you there is nothing more frustrating than having to grab and tilt your graphs up every time you hit a big wave and the graph mount falls down. Normally this means you are not paying attention to the waves and will eventually misjudge one and take a very unwanted bath. Having said that, there are several graph mounts

out there which will ensure that your units stay in one place.

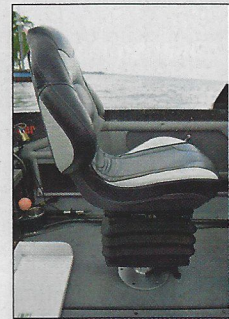
For a start, you always want to stick with a metal graph mount, which are much stronger and are designed for rough water. The Bert's Custom Tackle electronics mounts as well as the Traxstech mounts are the two with which many other charter captains and I have had success. Another new one that looks ex-

remely good is the KVD Kong electronics mount, although I have not yet actually tried one. Once you install a top-of-the-line graph mount such as these, your graphs will be right where you need them all day long.

Seats

One of the biggest complaints I hear about running boats in rough water is the effect that it has on your body. The constant beating of rough waves can make you feel like you lost a heavyweight boxing match. One easy way to greatly reduce the impact of the waves on your body is to install compression seats.

For the last five years I have been using Smooth Moves Ultra Boat Seats. Despite their name, these are actually not seats but rather pedestals that attach to your boat seat. They work like a large spring allowing you to bounce up and down slightly



A Smooth Moves Ultra Boat Seat takes a lot of the bounce out of rough water.

while you drive, meanwhile allowing the compression of the pedestal, rather than your body, to absorb the impact. These seats and others like them will make a huge difference in how you feel after a day in rough water.

Motor

The last major change you can make to your boat to prepare for rough water is your propeller. Most boat motors are outfitted with a prop that is designed to optimize speed, which normally means a higher pitch and less torque. The higher pitch limits resistance in the water at high speeds allowing your boat to achieve top end speed. However, in rough water the focus is far different.

For a start it doesn't make any difference in four-foot waves if your boat's top speed is 58 mph or 62 mph since you will be lucky to hit 30 mph in that chop. Your focus in rough water needs to be on increasing your torque and hole shot. By

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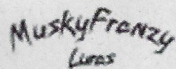
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adding torque you will increase your ability to run super rough water by allowing the boat to get on plane quickly in waves, as well as making it very easy for you to throttle up and down in big swells without having to worry about the boat bogging down or over-revving. Basically, increased torque means increased handling, decreased torque means higher top end speed but worse handling in rough water. In order to increase your torque for rough water you want to outfit your motor with a lower pitch prop, sometimes a four-blade in order to give you the most torque possible and therefore the best handling in rough water. Ask your local marina or dealership what props they recommend for your boat and motor to optimize rough water capabilities.

As more fishermen head toward rough water, there has been an explosion in the number of boat accessories designed to help our boats and bodies handle it. By using several of these products — as well as making some necessary modifications — you will not only ensure your boat functions properly in big water but also that you get the easiest ride possible in heavy chop.

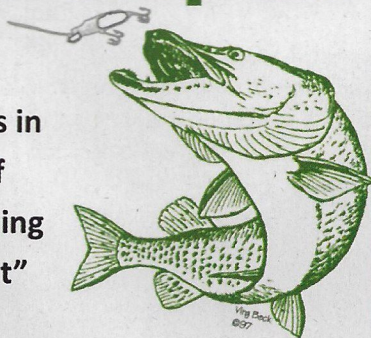
The greatest tool in any fishing application is not a lure, rod, reel or graph. It is your boat. By preparing your boat for the challenges that rough water throws at you, you will get more time on the water and more fish in the net!

For more about Field Editor Spencer Berman, visit www.spencersanglingadv.com



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