

GUIDE TO BUYING A USED LASER

Over 190,000 Lasers have been built in 35 years. Most of these are still racing and can offer a low cost way of experiencing the thrill of Laser sailing and racing enjoyed by many people throughout the world.

Like most products the value of a Laser depends on the amount and type of use a boat has had. A one year old boat that has been raced 10 hours a week in strong winds and waves by a fit young man is probably more "tired" than a five year old boat sailed only occasionally in light winds.

There is very little that can go wrong with a Laser. Most faults in used boats are a result of user abuse, an accident or general wear and tear. The following guide may be useful in highlighting some of the more common problems that might be found in used boats. This guide is not a substitute for an inspection by a qualified marine surveyor.

HULL

All Lasers built by a licensed builder will have a number embedded in the gelcoat of the hull either under the bow eye on the deck or in the transom. In addition boat numbers after 148200 should have a tamperproof adhesive foil sticker in the back of the cockpit showing the International Laser Class Sailboat Sail number.

The hull is made from glass reinforced plastic (grp) with foam stringers. Inside the hull there is positive buoyancy which will be either white polystyrene foam blocks (sometimes within plastic bags) or plastic air containers. These can normally be seen through the transom drain bung. The buoyancy can move around inside the hull and can sometimes be heard if the boat is inverted.

A hull that has been painted on top of the gel coat is likely to have had more hard use than a non painted one and will need re - painting regularly to maintain an attractive finish. Look out for hair line star cracks as these are normally a sign of impact. Cracking might also occur around the centreboard box or mast step as a result of collision or bad storage. Normally gelcoat cracking will not affect the structure of the hull.

With the boat hull side up check the fairness of the hull. Bad storage with point loads can cause dents in the hull.

Whilst the boat is upside down check the glue joint between the deck and hull for evidence of cracking along the joint. Any cracks can be repaired by raking out the joint and re gluing.

If a black plastic bailer is fitted to the cockpit drain it should lay flat to the hull and when the metal arm in the cockpit is pulled the bailer should "snap" open. When the arm is pushed the bailer should "spring" close. If there is a fault a replacement bailer is easy to fit.

DECK

The checks applied to the hull should also be applied to the deck. After hard use the deck foam can occasionally separate from the grp creating soft areas. Test with the palm of your hand working over the deck and firmly pressing the non skid areas. Pay particular attention to the side deck in the cockpit area. Soft areas will have a different feel to the rest of the deck.

Pay attention to the mast step. Wear and damage can take place at the join between the deck and tube, along the length of the tube and at the base. Use a torch to look down the tube. Later boats have a metal disc in the grp at the bottom of the tube to prevent wear.

Some owners put a hatch in the boat to air it or the hatch would have been put in for a repair. If the hatch is alongside the centreboard it is probably for airing the boat. Open the hatch cover and with a torch look inside for obvious signs of a repair. Pay attention to the mast step and mast tube. Any repair, if done properly, should not adversely affect the strength of the hull or deck.

SPARS

The mast and boom should be straight. A slight bend in the boom is not significant. The biggest enemy of aluminium is corrosion. Check all rivets particularly at the gooseneck, the vang (kicking strap) fittings on the boom and mast, upper mast collar and the boom blocks. Watch out for stress lines, corrosion and/or cracks at these points. Loose fittings with corrosion will mean the spar has been weakened. The fittings can be removed and the spars end for ended.

SAIL

All sails for any boats lose their performance the more they are used. For racing above "club level" most people will purchase a new sail every one or two years. For fun sailing, training and non performance racing any age sail is sufficient providing the stitching and cloth still holds together! Unfortunately it is impossible to measure how good a sail is. A general opinion on the look and condition is the best you can do.

CENTREBOARD AND RUDDER

Most centreboards and rudders are made from foam which is reinforced with steel wire. Any dents in the foam can be filled with car body filler. Chips can be repaired using epoxy or polyester resins with reinforcement. Remove the rudder blade from the head and look for cracks caused by the rudder bolt not being tight enough. Also check the rudder downhaul hole for damage that might have been caused by the rudder grounding when tied down.

Check the aluminium rudder head for corrosion and security of fastenings. Also make sure the head is not bent.

VALUE

This depends a lot on the condition of the boat and what is included in the price. A launching trolley (dolly) is very useful as is a top cover. Foil carry bags, bottom covers, roof rack and spares can all add to the value and are certainly significant if you have to go and buy them new.

Good Luck with your new boat.

Jeff Martin

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