Laser Sailing Dinghy Buying Guide

One of summer's great pleasures for the coastally inclined is being out on the water in a sailing rig. It helps to have the right sailboat and a great spot for sailing, such as the So lent in Hampshire, but the skill of the sailor is still a critical element to cruising on water by the power of wind. One vessel that truly tests a sailor's skills is the Laser. These small, sleek sailing dinghies require full-time dedication from their captains in order to sail well.

An individual interested in purchasing a Laser sailing dinghy need not ponder over a variety of options, though. The Laser is designed to meet universal standards regarding its dimensions in order to test sailors' capabilities. Although consumers do not need to review many options, they do need to know a few basic points about Laser dinghies and their characteristics in order to successfully purchase one from an online source such as eBay. A few buying tips regarding the condition of used Laser sailing dinghies, customization options, and accessories are also helpful. By learning what there is to know about these vessels, a consumer can quickly find himself cruising the seas in one.

The Basics of Laser Sailing Dinghies

Those who are new to sailing with Laser dinghies should learn a few basic points about these vessels before shopping for them. It is important for these consumers to have good background knowledge of Laser sailing dinghies and to learn the serial number system for these products.

Background

The Laser is first and foremost a competitive sailing boat meant to test the skills of the sailor rather than the design of the boat. For this reason, every Laser is built according to the same specifications regarding its hull, sails, and equipment. It can hold two people, but one person usually operates the vessel. The Laser is a popular sailboat due to its ease of rigging and sailing. A person sailing a Laser should be in good physical condition to handle the rigors of operating this vessel.

The Laser has been in production since the early 1970s and received its own class in Olympic sailing in 1996. Manufacturers now produce variants of the original Laser with different sail and hull sizes. Sailing Lasers is popular throughout the world, with numerous companies across the globe producing the vessel according to the same specifications.

Serial Number

Every Laser features a serial number on the rear of the boat to indicate when and where the boat was manufactured. The format is three letters followed by a series of letters and numbers. The three letters tell consumers where the Laser was produced. The following five numbers indicate the sail number. If the number is greater than 99,999, a letter before the five digits is used to indicate the numbers. Therefore, the letter "A" is equal to 100,000, "B" equals 200,000, and so on. The last four characters in the serial number are generally one letter and three numbers, with the letter indicating

the month the Laser was produced, followed by a number indicating the year, followed by two more numbers indicating the model year. "A" indicates August, "B" indicates September, "C" indicates "October", and so forth. If the last three numbers are 394, it means that that the Laser was built in 1993, and the model is 1994. Consumers can use the serial number to confirm that a Laser was built when the seller says it was.

Characteristics of a Laser Sailing Dinghy

Being familiar with the characteristics of Laser sailing dinghies is an important aspect of purchasing one. By knowing the different types, specifications, and parts of Laser dinghies, consumers can make intelligent decisions about purchasing them.

Types

The table below describes the various types of Laser sailing dinghies besides the original Laser, which is often referred to as the Laser Standard. The features of the Laser Standard are discussed in a later section.

Type	Description
Laser Radial	Smaller sail than the Laser Standard; used in the Women's Singlehanded Dinghy at the 2008 Olympics; sailors should weigh 55-72 kg
Laser 4.7	Also has a smaller sail than the Laser Standard, but a different shape than the sail of the Radial; sailors should weigh 50-55 kg
Laser M	Rarer Laser version; smaller hull for smaller sailors; short mast makes it difficult to operate; not officially recognized as part of Laser class
Rooster 8.1	Produced in the UK; larger hull for larger sailors; different options for mast length; not officially recognized as part of Laser class

Although the Laser Radial and Laser 4.7 are part of the Laser class, they are raced separately from Laser Standard dinghies in official competitions. It is recommended that sailors of a Laser Standard weigh at least 80 kg.

Specifications

As mentioned above, Laser Standards have specific specifications regarding the hull and sail. This is to standardize the boat in order to remove it as a factor in testing sailors' skills against one another.

Hull

The hull of a Laser Standard is 4.23 m long, and its waterline length is 3.81 m. It weighs 56.7 kg, making the Laser a highly portable vessel. Many sailors are able to fix it to a rack on the roof of their cars.

Sail

Every Laser has a single, main sail. The sail area of a Laser Standard is 7.06 m^2, and the sail area of a Laser Radial is 5.76 m^2.

Parts

If buying a used Laser sailing dinghy, the consumer should be aware of the various parts in the boat. This helps the consumer to make sure that they are in good working order.

Hull

The hull is the part around which the rest of the Laser is built. It is therefore of primary importance that it be in good shape. While replacing other parts is much less expensive, a cracked hull may necessitate the replacement of the entire boat.

The hull is constructed from glass-reinforced plastic. It contains either polystyrene foam blocks or plastic air containers to give it buoyancy. If the previous owner has painted over the factory finish, it is likely that the Laser has experienced some wear and tear. Consumers should be prepared to maintain the finish in this case. The important thing is that the hull has no cracks in it, as these can render a Laser useless.

Deck

The deck is the top area of the dinghy. This is where the cockpit is located, and the part to which the mast is fixed. It is important to check for soft areas on the deck that may have developed after extended use. The mast tube should fix firmly to the deck. If the deck features a hatch, check that it opens and closes smoothly and look inside for any signs of damage that the hatch may be covering.

Mast and Boom

The mast is the vertical pole, and the boom the horizontal pole to which the sail is fixed. Both should be straight, but it is okay if the boom has a gentle bend. It is also important that neither has extensive corrosion. Any rust should be superficial.

Sail

Although a Laser is often sold with a sail attached, it is not unusual for the sail to require replacement soon after the Laser is purchased. A soft sail is unusable, though a sail that has been used for a week should feature a few creases. The sail should not be modified beyond a small patch to cover a tear. Otherwise, the sail does not meet regulations.

Foil

The foil is the Laser's centerboard and rudder, used to steer the vessel. They are made of either foam with steel-wire reinforcement or glass-reinforced plastic, with the rudder head usually being aluminum. Minor damage to the foam or plastic does not present a problem since it can be repaired with items such as car body filler and epoxy. It is important that the rudder blade be free of cracks.

Additional Laser Sailing Dinghy Buying Tips

Beyond acquiring product knowledge, consumers should follow a few additional buying tips regarding checking the condition of a Laser, customizing a Laser, and purchasing accessories. Following these tips should fully prepare consumers to purchase their Lasers.

Checking the Condition

Checking the condition of every part is important for the consumer considering a used Laser. Sellers should make note of any damage in their listings, no matter how big or small. Consumers should look for scratches and cracks on the hull, and they should make sure the hull and deck are both rigid throughout. The hull should be free of water as well. The mast step and tube should be free of cracks and leaks. Sellers should make note of the condition of the sail, and consumers should cross-check that with their own observations. The sail should also feature a red Laser patch by the tack. The mast should be straight, and the boom should have no more than a slight bend. Straight is ideal for that part too, though. The foil should be in good working order.

Customizing a Laser

Those who plan to race their Lasers competitively may want to add an XD kit to the vessel. This makes it easier for sailors to control the shape of the sail in changing wind conditions. As a result, sailors have more control over the Laser in strong winds.

Accessories

If a consumer does not already have accessories such as a dolly, trailer, gear bag, cover, and carbon tiller, then he or she may want to look for Laser sailing dinghies that come with these extras. It is easy enough to locate the accessories separately, but some sellers include them with the vessel, especially if the listing is for a used boat. The accessories make transporting, setting up, and maintaining a Laser easier.

Buying a Laser Sailing Dinghy on eBay

It is possible to buy a new Laser sailing dinghy from a local retailer of Laser boats or find a used one through classified ads. The online site eBay usually carries a number of Lasers for sale as well. It is easy to search the website to find the Laser you are looking for. You can also purchase parts and accessories from sellers on the website.

To perform a search, visit any eBay page, type a term such as "Laser dinghy" into the search bar, and choose the Sailing category when you see the results. All of the items for sale on eBay that are related to the search term should be appearing in the results. You can either choose the Dinghies/Boats sub-category to see all of the Lasers for sale, or the Accessories & Equipment subcategory to see the related accessories and parts for sale on the site. You can also perform a more targeted search if you have a specific accessory in mind.

Conclusion

Many sailors consider the Laser sailing dinghy to be one of the true tests of a sailor's individual sailing capabilities. Sailing a Laser requires stamina, good control of the sail, and a good feeling for the wind and the waves. The developers of the first Lasers set standards for the boat in order to create a level playing field for those racing against one another. By doing so, it is skill that determines the better sailor rather than boat.

The standardization of the Laser sailing dinghy means that consumers need not choose between features when deciding which one to buy. There are a few different types of Lasers, but there are also separate classes for these boats, and they therefore must meet certain standards as well. Consumers must pay attention to the standards for Laser sailing dinghies and be sure the Lasers they want to purchase meet those standards. They should also pay attention to the condition of Lasers and be aware of customization options and accessories. EBay is a good source from which to buy Lasers, and consumers can shop successfully through the website as long as they know what to look for in these unique boats.