

Outdoors with Luke Clausen - A boat's more fun if you've got the right one

by *Luke_Clausen*

As a professional bass angler, I spend the months in between seasons preparing for the next year. I take an inventory of my tackle and tools, repairing some and replacing others. Though my season is about to kick off later this month, I realize that many of you are waiting on the return of warmer weather before you return to the water in search of fish. Ranger Boats Pro Staff member Luke Clausen is the 2006 Bassmaster Classic champion and the youngest angler in professional fishing history to eclipse the \$1 million career earnings mark.

Instead of sitting inside (where it's no doubt warm) and wishing you were fishing, now is a great time to think about what kind of fishing and how much of it you plan to do in the next year. If you find that you need new baits or rods and reels, now is a great time to go to your favorite tackle store and stock up. If you realize that you're in need of a new boat, don't feel like you need to rush out and pick one up today. Take advantage of the boat show season because there's sure to be one near your area where you can talk with experienced sales professionals who can give you guidance on what kind of boat best suits your needs. When choosing what kind of boat you want to fish out of for the next year or the next 10, the first thing you need to identify is what do you plan to do with the boat? Are you an angler? Do you want to ski or take pleasure rides or do you need something that does it all? Some boats only do one - like my Ranger Z19, which is designed specifically for serious fishing. Some have multiple functions. Also, where do you plan to do these activities? My tournament schedule calls for fishing a lot of southern lakes with lots of trees and boat docks to maneuver around, so I went with the 19-foot Ranger. Anglers on the Great Lakes would be better served with a 21-footer. Also, do you plan to use your boat in fresh or saltwater? Most boats are not designed to do both and you can easily ruin a freshwater boat in saltwater. Once you know where you're going and what you're doing, you need to know how many people are going with you. That helps you determine what size boat you need. Are you taking yourself and a friend or the whole family? Size also determines how much gear you can haul and what kind of conditions the boat is designed for. Once you know how big your boat will be, you can determine what kind of vehicle you need to haul it. Remember: the bigger the boat, the bigger the tow vehicle. Make sure you consult your vehicle's owner's manual for specific towing instructions. One of the choices that many people struggle with is aluminum or fiberglass. In the past, aluminum boats have been cheaper, but with the rising cost of aluminum, these boats are every bit as expensive and sometimes even more so than a fiberglass boat. Also, an advantage of fiberglass over aluminum is the soundness of the construction. Because a fiberglass hull is one solid piece, you are less likely to experience problems that welded and riveted aluminum hulls have. Also, fiberglass is cheaper to repair and makes for a more stable platform, providing extra peace of mind. Plus, fiberglass boats are rated for more horsepower than aluminum boats of the same size, which is important to those people who like to go fast on the water. Once you've answered these questions, make sure you spend some time around a boat like the one you plan on buying before purchasing. One-the-water test drives are great to learn how to operate a boat and to see how it handles. Make sure that the layout is one that will suit your usage and blend well into your family's lifestyle. Boats last longer when they are stored in a garage when not in use, so the size of your parking area will also play a factor in your boat-buying decisions. A boat is a great investment in yourself and your family. I wouldn't trade anything for the times I spent on the water with my family as a child. We fished and skied and enjoyed each other's company away from the TV and the telephone and I feel that it had a great influence on the person that I became. If you want to have the same experiences with your family, now's the time to start investigating your options by going to a boat show and finding the boat that's right for you.

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