

The Key Moment

Making smart choices immediately after closing on a trawler can help improve your boating experience.



With key in hand, you unlock the salon door for the first time, signifying your transition from buyer to owner. This is the “key moment” when the happy times begin for any trawler owner.

Take a few minutes to soak it in. Go ahead and smile as you look around.

Then, it’s time to start making this trawler your own.

Boats don’t have welcome walk-throughs the way homes do. Typically, arrangements are made for you to pick up the key at the marina office or collect it from a combination lockbox on deck. There should also be keys to the boat’s outside doors, dock box, electrical panel, engine starter, outboard starter, interior cabin doors and more.

Next comes deciding on rules for everyone aboard. Will you wear shoes inside, or take them off? Will you clean as you go and keep things shipshape?

One early priority should be to review the U.S. Coast Guard requirements. Outline what you have and where it is located (email me at jeff@jmys.com with “Safety First” in the subject line, and I’ll send you the safety-gear document we provide to our clients). Contact the local Coast Guard Auxiliary and schedule an appointment for a complimentary inspection to confirm you are in compliance.

There are a lot of subscriptions, registrations and passwords for navigation and communications equipment, computers and the like. Was this information transferred to you? Also, is there a safe? If so, do you know the combination?

Another early task should be to transfer the Maritime Mobile Service Identity (the ship’s digital frequency identifier, or MMSI) into your name. Also contact the Federal Communications Commission about registering the EPIRB and any personal locator beacons. Some of our clients find it easier to consult with a local electronics dealer to update the onboard software for your new vessel name on the Automatic Identification System and other systems.

Speaking of which: What are you doing about the name and

hailing port? If you are making changes, order your custom lettering and legitimize the change of command. Will you have a ceremony? It’s time to start planning it.

Consolidate all of your important documents in one place. Your binder of ship’s papers should include the U.S. Coast Guard documentation, state title registrations, insurance binder document, dinghy forms and more. Some closing agents provide traveling papers to show proof to authorities that the official papers after closing have been filed, but not fully processed.

The marina will need a copy of your insurance. Do you have safety repairs that need to be addressed immediately, with proof of completion sent back to the underwriter? Now is the time for that too, as well as fulfilling any needed Coast Guard captain’s training requirement.

Consider signing up for a towing service before you leave the dock. It is easier to make mistakes in the early days of ownership, and it can be expensive to get towed back to the dock.

You also need to figure out where all of your gear is going to fit. Before moving in, conduct a deep clean from bow to stern, going room by room. Go through each locker and drawer. Organizing the stowage space under settee cushions and berth mattresses will help you better understand your capacity for provisioning, and will help you determine where to stow assorted boat parts, cleaning products, housewares and more.

Recordkeeping takes time, but if you log in details daily as they occur, you will keep in tune with your trawler. There are critical service intervals that must be observed on your primary machinery. Many of our clients create spreadsheets for updating and tracking ship’s maintenance. Start with a clean slate, and stay ahead of projects.

This is also a good time to install a remote monitoring system that will let you know if your shore power is connected, and if your bilge pump is discharging.

There is still a lot more to think about, but you will have plenty of time to figure out the rest. Relax, enjoy and get on with the adventures. 🍷