

Used sailboat inspection checklist

By buying stage: before you travel, at the viewing, and what only a surveyor can tell you

Three jobs, in order. **Stage one costs nothing** and settles most of the expensive questions from your desk. **Stage two** is your own eyes and hands aboard. **Stage three** is the surveyor. Done in this order, you never pay for stage three on a boat that failed stage one. Bring the model's own fault list with you; generic checklists miss exactly the things that are specific.

1 Before you travel

Cost: **nothing** · Decides: whether to book the flight

☐ Hull identification number	Year, builder, hull number. Matches the listing? On some models the hull number alone changes the price.
☐ The model's documented faults	Read the buyer guide for this model before the listing. Arrive knowing what to ask.
☐ Standing rigging age	"When was it last replaced, by whom, invoice?" Wire: 10 to 15 year working life. "Looks fine" is not an answer.
☐ Engine identity, hours, log	Make, model, hour-meter reading, service log with dates. The log matters more than the number.
☐ Grounding history	"Ever been aground? What was done afterwards?" Either "no" or a yard invoice.
☐ Keel type and draft	Fin, wing, shoal, full, encapsulated. Know what a grounding would have hit first.
☐ Through-hulls	Proper seacocks, or original gate valves? Gate valves on 1970s and 80s boats are a known replacement item.
☐ Tanks	Fuel and water: material, and how they are mounted. Aluminium on wood corrodes from underneath.
☐ Chainplates	Ask for photos at deck level and of the bulkhead below. No staining, no crazing. Replaced, if the model is known for it.
☐ Previous survey	"Is there a report from your purchase?" Its findings list is your viewing checklist.
☐ Berth and haul-out length	Overall length including bowsprit and boomkin, not length on deck. You pay for the longer number.
☐ Photos of the unglamorous	Bilge, engine compartment, chainplate bases, keel joint. Quick and willing says a lot. Cushions instead says more.

Rule: a listing that does not mention something has told you nothing about it. Every omission is a question, never a quiet assumption the work was done.

☐ Deck	Walk every square foot pressing with your heel. Tap around each fitting. Soft spots, dull sound, crazing at stanchions, cleats, mast base.
☐ Chainplates, on deck	Cracked or lifting sealant, rust weeping, crazing around each one.
☐ Chainplates, below	Open lockers. The bulkhead or knee each one bolts to. Brown staining, softness, delaminated tabbing. This is how rigs are lost.
☐ Standing rigging	Rag along each wire near the swages. Broken strands catch the rag. Cracked swages. Rust bleeding from terminals.
☐ Mast base and step	Compression of the deck, a crushed step, a soft wooden compression post.
☐ Hull, outside	Sight along the topsides in low light. Waviness means repairs. Weeping or a seam at the keel joint.
☐ Bilge	Lift every sole board. Smell first. Standing water, oil, musty smell, rust around keel bolts, high-water staining.
☐ Keel bolts	Rust weeping, cracked glass around the heads, evidence of grinding or filling.
☐ Through-hulls	Turn every one. Seacocks turn and shut. Gate valves seize and you cannot see open from closed.
☐ Rudder and steering	Push the rudder from the dock. Wheel or tiller lock to lock. Play, clunking, stiffness, delamination at the leading edge.
☐ Engine, cold start	Insist she has not run that morning. Start her yourself. Smoke that does not clear, hard starting, knocking. Oil under the engine, coolant weeps, a dripping stern gland.
☐ Engine compartment	Rust on the block, salt trails, chafed hoses, fuel smell. A freshly painted engine is a question, not an answer.
☐ Tanks	Find them. How mounted. Aluminium on wood, rusty steel, cloudy plastic. When last opened?
☐ Electrical	Open the panel, follow some wiring. Tinned marine cable, labels, proper terminals. Household wire means an amateur has been here, and elsewhere.
☐ Sails	Unroll all of them, on the dock if needed. Crinkled or soft cloth, thin leech, failing stitching, UV damage on the furled edge.
☐ Ports, hatches, windows	Headliner and cushions beneath each. Water staining, rebedding attempts, cloudy acrylic.
☐ Joinery and tabbing	Press on bulkheads. Where furniture meets hull. Movement, cracked tabbing, filler. On kit-built boats this is the whole question.
☐ Ground tackle	Anchor, chain, windlass. Rusted chain, a windlass that does not turn, an anchor too small.
☐ Model-specific checks	From the boat's own guide. Swing keel pivot on a Catalina 22. Tank mounting on a Cape Dory 28. Kit or factory on a Westsail 32.

Bring: a torch, a small screwdriver for tapping, a notebook, clothes you can crawl in, and the model's fault list. Allow two hours. Do not let the seller set the pace.

3

What only a surveyor can tell you

Cost: **several hundred to a few thousand dollars** · Decides: buy, renegotiate, or walk

☐	Moisture meter and percussion	Whole hull and deck. Maps wet core you could only guess at.
☐	Haul-out inspection	Keel joint under load, rudder bearings, prop and shaft, through-hulls from outside, blisters.
☐	Sea trial	Engine at cruising revs long enough to show temperature and smoke. Rig and steering under load.
☐	Rig inspection aloft	Or a rigger's report on the surveyor's recommendation.
☐	Engine oil analysis	Ask for it. Reads wear metals the hour meter cannot.
☐	Written report	One an insurer accepts and a seller has to answer.
☐	Your surveyor, not the seller's	SAMS or NAMS accredited, working for you, paid by you. A seller's survey is marketing.

How many engine hours is too many?

- Owner consensus: small marine diesels last around **8,000 hours**, 10,000 achievable. Heavy slow-revving engines outlast light high-revving ones.
- **The log beats the meter.** A documented 4,000-hour engine is a safer buy than an undocumented 1,500-hour one.
- **Low hours can be the worse sign.** Diesels corrode when they sit. Service intervals are calendar-based for this reason.
- Ask for: oil-change dates, heat exchanger cleaned, exhaust elbow replaced, impeller changed annually.

Do the stages in order. A survey that finds nothing confirms the price. A survey that finds a wet deck and a tired rig gives you a written, costed list to negotiate from.

Notes, hull number, seller's answers, photos requested

Free, no sign-up. Stage one is what Knotworth's free pre-check does automatically: paste a listing URL and it lists which of these questions the advertisement leaves unanswered. Full guide, model-specific fault lists and survey pricing at getknotworth.com. Every figure is a range with its assumption stated; a real quote from your yard always beats the model.