

The Outboard Buying Guide

Pick the right motor with confidence - HP, shaft, rigging & freight, explained.

This short guide walks you through the handful of decisions that actually matter when buying an outboard - so you order the right motor the first time. When you are ready, our specialists will spec the complete package and arrange insured freight nationwide.

How much horsepower do you need?

Start with your boat's capacity plate - never exceed the maximum rated horsepower. For most boats the right answer is at or near that max: an under-powered boat struggles to plane, burns more fuel and handles worse in chop.

Rules of thumb: small tenders and jon boats run 2.5-20 HP; aluminum fishing and pontoons 25-115 HP; bay boats and mid-size center consoles 90-300 HP; offshore and large pontoons often run twin or triple rigs.

Carrying gear, passengers or fishing with a full livewell? Size up rather than down - the engine spends less time straining and lasts longer.

Shaft length: get this right

Shaft length must match your transom height or the engine will cavitate (too short) or drag (too long). Measure from the top of the transom straight down to the bottom of the hull.

Common sizes: 15" (Short / S) for ~15" transoms, 20" (Long / L) for ~20", 25" (Extra-Long / XL) for ~25" - typical on offshore and pontoon boats.

The anti-ventilation plate should sit roughly 1" below the hull bottom at speed. If you are repowering, match the shaft length of the motor you are replacing.

4-stroke vs 2-stroke

4-stroke (most modern outboards): quiet, smooth, fuel-efficient, no oil mixing, low emissions. Slightly heavier. The default choice for nearly all buyers today.

Direct-injected 2-stroke (e.g. Evinrude E-TEC legacy, Mercury OptiMax): lighter and strong low-end punch, but louder and thirstier. Mostly relevant for specific performance or repower cases.

For family, fishing and repower use, a modern 4-stroke EFI is almost always the right call.

Controls, rigging & propeller

Tiller vs remote: tiller steering suits small motors and simple boats; remote (wheel + binnacle control box) is standard from ~25 HP up and required for most consoles.

Mechanical vs digital (DTS / fly-by-wire): mechanical cables are simple and economical; digital throttle & shift gives buttery control and easy multi-engine rigging - worth it on larger motors.

Budget for rigging: control cables, harness, gauges/displays, battery, and the right stainless or aluminum propeller (pitch tuned to your boat). We spec all of this for you on every quote.

Buying with confidence

New vs repowered: brand-new motors carry full factory warranty; professionally repowered units are inspected, water-tested and warrantied - a smart way to save on a proven block.

Freight: large outboards ship crated and fully insured to a business or freight terminal. We handle the logistics and confirm delivery details with you.

Payment: we use secure bank (wire) transfer - no card surcharges on high-value purchases. A specialist confirms availability and freight before any payment, and your bank details appear in your account.

Your next step

Not sure which motor fits? Take the 60-second "Find My Motor" quiz on our homepage for personalized matches, or request a free quote on any model and we will spec the complete package - motor, controls, rigging and freight.

Questions? Call (585) 534-8023, reply to the email this guide came from, or write info@get-outboard.com. Real riggers, ready to help you get it right.