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How To Buy A Used Boat - Government Boat Auctions

By [Phil Marks](#)

Government boat auctions are big business and include police and coastguard seizures. These arrests may often be linked to drug running (one of my own boats was arrested by customs with drugs aboard - before I acquired her, I hasten to add, and then disposed of through a government boats auction). Boats at auction may also come from the military - for example the Navy has fleets of sail and power craft which they use for training ratings and officers. These vessels may be worked hard but are usually well maintained, up to a point. When they are replaced they come up for sale at government surplus auctions. You will usually be buying 'sold as seen' and that is a risk unless you really take some care and advice.

Government auctions boats - not a headline you see in the press, as there is an auction somewhere most days, but what are the real risks of finding your dream boat at auction?

'Sold as Seen' can be pretty scary. It is not easy to fully check a boat and sue the government after the event. With an auto auction you might get a few hours after buying to return the car - with a yacht you may have a few days, you may not - it all depends on the auctioneer's terms and conditions, so study the auction terms beforehand. The main chance you take is that you may have no time to get the boat properly checked out beforehand - she may be afloat; in that case though, you can easily tell if she is leaking. If she's ashore then it's easier, though you obviously can't easily tell if she's watertight. Either way, you will certainly be able to check her out pre-auction. It may be worth hiring a yacht surveyor if you are not an expert yourself or don't have a knowledgeable friend to go with you. Good auction companies will declare known faults in the auction catalogue.

If the boat been used by the government itself (or an agency), then the vessel will have had a lot of use - on a yacht, rigging and sails may need replacement (not easy to judge rigging without specialist equipment) and / or the engines might have a lot of hours on them - which is not necessarily a bad thing. Probably, she will have missed her last service and not all equipment will be working (especially electronics). The auction company may offer a simple condition report and specification.

If the vessel was confiscated, then it can be even harder to judge. Where did she come from? Where was she seized? If a vessel has been used for smuggling drugs, then it is likely that it will be sound. People don't put a load of drugs in a vessel that's either likely to sink or have a failure and need rescuing. Not good business.

If you have picked out the boat you fancy, and she is a well known brand/model (maybe say, a Chris Craft), then search the web to find out if there is an owners association. There may be forum discussions too, maybe on a boating magazine website. These enquiries may give you clues as to the faults that you should watch out for with that particular brand or model.

So, why on earth (or on the sea!) would you bid on a power boat or yacht at a yacht auction? Simple - price. You can get the best bargains that way.

Phil is an experienced sailor with over fifty years experience of boats, from sailing dinghies to ocean cruising in his own boat. He owns a government boat auction yacht. Find out more about [how to buy a used boat](#) and more about government boat auctions at ==> how-to-buy-a-used-boat.com

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