

How to Launch your Boat Safely

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Mistakes at a boating launch...a hazard whenever cars, trucks and trailers operate in close quarters...can result in serious injuries and property damage. Launch ramps are often crowded with boaters so eager to launch that they forget or neglect important steps.



Don't be a ramp hog - that is a person completely unprepared to launch their boat when they splash the trailer. They prepare their boat with the boat on the trailer and tow vehicle in the launch ramp

blocking others. Lead by example; prepare your boat either to one side of the drive or in the trailer parking lot. Consider using my safe-launch checklist.

- The lot and drive should have no overhead power lines but check before raising your antennas then check radio operation.
- Check that water depth at the ramp is adequate for your boat and wide enough for both the boat and trailer. Also check that the ramp's incline is appropriate for the length of the boat and trailer.
- Make initial launch preparations away from the ramp. If the boat has a mooring cover, I find folding it lengthwise first then folding stern to bow made recovering simple.
- If yours boat has an IO, run it down and up to guarantee it works before launch. Check the bilge blower and bilge pumps plus all fluid levels one last time.
- Install the drain plug. Keeping the plug on the winch handle or boat ignition key guaranteed I always installed the plug before launch.
- Load coolers, fishing tackle, bait, food and drinks along with other gear now so they're not lost at the ramp or dock.
- Disconnect the trailer wiring. Remove the rear tie downs, leaving the front safety chain and winch line attached. Insure that the outdrive or motor is raised to keep it from fragging on the ramp and check the drain plug one more time.
- The time invested in boat prep also lets the trailer's wheel bearings cool before dunking in cool water. Rapid cooling sucks water into the bearings. For their protection, your trailer wheel hubs have caps that seal out water, Bearing Buddies.

- Keeping the boat winched to the trailer, back the trailer down the ramp, keeping the tow vehicle's wheels out of the water. Shift into park, set the emergency and block the wheels.
- Run the blower on inboard boats five minutes before starting. Lower the outdrive or motor, look for water entering the boat, sniff the bilge and start the motor.
- Attach a bow line to the boat, release the winch and disconnect the winch line. Launch the boat with a slight shove or by backing away under power.
- Before pulling out, secure or reel in the winch line. Then move the towing vehicle and trailer to the parking lot to make room for the next boat and trailer in line.
- Move your boat to a dock away from the ramp to load passengers and any additional gear. At the ramp, secure a line to either the bow or mid cleat with a person holding the loose end. This person controls the boat when it floats free. In high wind, secure a line to each the bow and mid cleats asking another boater to help hold a line. The mid-cleat line helps in pulling the boat forward, backward or sideways into the dock.

Some prefer unhooking the winch line, letting the boat float free. Others play out the winch line, sliding the boat off the trailer. The choice depends on ramp slope and wind conditions. Again, a person should always control the boat with the loose end of the line secured to the boat.

Checklist complete, you're prepared to launch your boat quickly. No ramp hog here. Ramp etiquette for retrieving your boat is simply reversing the checklist and routine.

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