

FIX OR FLICK

Are you in a dilemma whether to repair or replace your outboard motor? **ANDY KELCKHOVEN** of **Outboard Parts Australia**, shares tips for deciding whether to fix or flick your engine, avoiding buying lemons, and how to keep outboards humming.

Interview by **Narayan Pattison**

Often the best way to judge whether an engine needs a tune-up is the boat owner's own experience with it. It is pretty common sense. But if the engine fails to start or cuts out on you more than a few times, then it is time for a check-up.

Find out the repair cost then weigh that up against the engine's age and value. In that way, you can make an informed decision about repairing it or buying a new one.

Re-build

Re-building your outboard is a great option that is getting used less and less these days in today's more throwaway society. The key questions when deciding whether to rebuild an engine are the outboard's age, value and general condition. A rebuild will only fix the mechanical parts, so you are still left with your old electric parts, which can be a concern with older outboards. A recent model is often worth rebuilding. But the flipside is new engines are more expensive to rebuild than the older ones.

Some people are very attached to their engines too and just love them. If you are one of them, you know exactly what engine you are working with and can feel very confident in rebuilding it, versus buying a used engine with an unknown history.

Buying used outboards

If you do decide to purchase instead of repair, there are many things to consider, too. Picking the right engine for your boat is very much a case-by-case decision. But the key factor is budget. A new engine will naturally give you the best reliability, but not everyone can afford a new engine. That is when a used outboard is a good option. This is especially true for the owners of the

very powerful, high horsepower engines; brand-new replacements cost tens of thousands to purchase.

Obviously, the main concern when buying a second-hand engine is that it might turn out to be a lemon. This is why it is good to buy from a reputable dealer so you get a warranty and can go back to them with any problems.

How many engine hours are too many? The healthy amount of hours can vary a lot depending on the model because each brand tends to have a different lifespan. Generally, you can have more confidence buying the used newer-model engines because they have computers in them that can give you an accurate breakdown of the engine's history. In older models, the engine hour gauges are less reliable.

You can also make some general assumptions about engines, namely that 2-strokes will give you more power, but 4-strokes will use less fuel, and can and give you twice the engine lifespan.

Engine checks. It is essential to get any used engine mechanically assessed before you buy it. We offer pre-purchase inspections that check everything top to bottom, including the important compression test. It is critical to do a compression test because it can determine whether the engine has sustained any damage or is worn out. Normally you would pay separately for these checks on a used engine but we've already done it on all our engines before you buy them.

Test-driving an engine. It is tough to properly check an engine on a test-drive unless you are a mechanic. However, if you are going without a mechanic, you want to make sure the engine operates well. To conduct your own engine check, begin by holding it at full throttle for



Andy Kelckhoven at Outboard Parts Australia

a couple of minutes and ensure no overheat alarms come on. Make sure it changes gears smoothly and generally performs well. Take it for a good run, because problems will not often show themselves immediately.

Engine use is key

While options are always available when your engine conks out on you, it is important that you keep your outboard well-maintained regardless of whether you have rebuilt it, or have bought a replacement.

The best way to keep your engine tip-top is to take the boat out regularly for good runs. Leaving your boat out of the water for lengthy periods can cause a big problem because when fuel evaporates or becomes stale it leaves a varnish behind which can 'gum' key fuel components. Use your boat regularly to avoid damaging the engine.

Andy Kelckhoven is one of the Gold Coast's most experienced outboard experts, having repaired thousands of engines through his business, Outboard Parts Australia. He is also the current World and Australian Champion for racing outboards in the surf, and maintains most of the Surf Life Savig Club outboards on the Gold Coast.

Disclaimer: The views expressed here are solely those of the author, and are not meant to replace professional advice specific to your needs. These tips only serve as a guide in conducting your own research before making major decisions.



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