

Buying a Boat in an Online Auction



by Tom Burrell, Southcentral Region Assistant Supervisor

Chances are, you or someone you know has used an online auction either to sell or buy an item. Although originally limited to small items that were sent through the mail, many of these online services now list cars, houses and boats of all sizes.

If you are considering buying a watercraft through an online auction, remember that there are specific requirements for registration and titling of watercraft used on Commonwealth waters.

Boats that must be registered include:

- Any boat powered by a gasoline, diesel or electric motor.
- Vessels documented by the U.S. Coast Guard for recreational purposes.
- Boats such as sailboats that use gasoline, diesel fuel or electric motors for auxiliary power.

Unpowered vessels are not required to be registered. However, registration or a launch permit is required if the vessel is to be used at Fish & Boat Commission access areas or lakes, or at Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of State Parks and Bureau of Forestry areas.

Boats that must be titled include:

- Any vessel of model year 1997 or newer powered by an inboard motor, including personal watercraft.
- Any vessel of model year 1997 or newer powered by an outboard motor that is 14 feet or longer in length.

- Any vessel currently titled in PA, regardless of size and type of motor.

- Any vessel currently titled in any other state, regardless of size and type of motor.

Once a vessel has been titled, it must remain titled by all future owners.

Keeping these requirements in mind, anyone who purchases a watercraft needs to obtain the documentation necessary to complete the registration process. This is especially important for anyone who purchases a watercraft from someone who may not be available to provide any missing documentation at a later date, such as a seller from an online auction.

What you need depends on whether you are purchasing a new vessel, one that has never been registered, or a used vessel. All requests for registration and title are submitted via PFBC Form REV-336, "Application for Pennsylvania Boat Registration and/or Boat Title." This form is available from Commission offices, the Commission web site, www.fish.state.pa.us, or authorized registration agents. See the Commission's web site for a complete list of agents.

All requests for new registrations must also include a properly transferred title, from PA or from another state, or the manufacturer's certificate of origin and a copy of the bill of sale. To transfer ownership of a used vessel, the last registered owner and the applicant must

complete and sign form REV-336. However, a bill of sale signed by the last registered owner may be substituted for the seller's signature on the REV-336.

Transferring a watercraft title is the same as transferring a car title. The seller must sign the back of the title and have it notarized. The buyer must then complete the required blocks, sign the title and submit it with form REV-336.

Sales tax

Proof of payment of sales tax, 6 percent for most of PA and 7 percent for residents of Allegheny and Philadelphia counties, must be submitted before any motorboat can be registered or titled. If sales tax was not paid at the time of purchase, it will be collected at the time of registration or titling.

Submitting an application for registration without the required documentation will delay the issuance of final registration. If that were to happen, you may risk having any temporary registration expire before the process has been completed. Should that happen, you would not be able to operate the watercraft until the registration is received from the Commission.

Before you bid on a boat in an online auction, confirm with the seller the availability of any necessary documents. Also confirm with the seller any other transactions required to complete the sale in Pennsylvania. □