

Outfitting Your Bass Boat

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photos by the author

Outfitting your bass fishing boat is a fun experience, but it can start to get confusing when you step into a retail store with thousands of potential items. When you are faced with many options, there are challenges and questions. What things do you need, and what things are simply nice to have on the water? From motors and livewells to anchors and fish finders, we'll explore some different types of bass fishing boats that Pennsylvanians like to fish from and what you need to make them work well on the water.

In Pennsylvania, there are two primary types of boat that come to mind when your friend tells you they just got a new, tricked-out fancy bass boat. One is a

This jonboat has been outfitted and designed for fishing shallow rivers like the Susquehanna River, where it is shown. It sports a trolling motor, jet drive outboard motor and many other useful additions. The raised casting platform near the bow is designed to give anglers an edge in spotting fish underwater and is useful for both spin fishing and fly fishing anglers.

fiberglass boat equipped to fish on lakes or reservoirs. The other is a flat-bottomed jonboat equipped to fish on rivers and streams. While there is certainly some overlap, we'll treat them separately since your outfitting choices are often different.

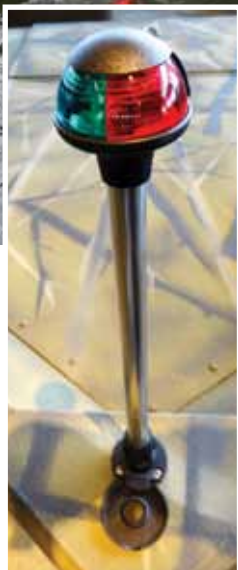
Jonboats

When setting up your jonboat for the river, there are many things to consider. First and foremost is the fact that you've





This high-quality fiberglass bass boat has been designed and customized to fish well on large bodies of water like Blue Marsh Lake, which is shown here.



Even if you're not planning on heading out at night, all bass boats should be equipped with running lights. Make sure you have easy access to all safety gear, including life jackets, a fire extinguisher and a sound-producing device when you outfit your bass boat.

likely chosen a jonboat for its shallow draft, flat bottom and aluminum hull since your chances of hitting rocks will be high. Pair a boat like this with a jet drive motor to optimize your ability to fish shallow rocky locations. Remember to size up the motor since jet drives are less efficient than propeller driven motors. Next, focus on what's going on inside the boat. Looking for an anchor for a jonboat? Choose a mushroom anchor. While originally designed for soft, muddy bottoms, these anchors will not snag as much in rocky spots in your local river, making it less likely that you'll lose an anchor when you're out fishing. Many anglers consider fishing electronics an option on a jonboat. Consider them a necessity. Many a fishing trip has been saved by the ability to find deep water structure on Pennsylvania rivers. Often a unit that shows depth is sufficient. A combined unit showing mapping is nice but not necessary for a jonboat. Thinking

about doing some live bait fishing? Make sure that you install a livewell on your boat. Models that are located under a seat work well and will give you room to bring home a fish or two as well. Using your outboard motor to move from location to location is fine on the river, but you should install a trolling motor for small movements to avoid scaring fish. It can make a big difference on your success, and it will allow you flexibility if you want to do some bass fishing on lakes or reservoirs as well. Rod storage is a challenge on a jonboat. Avoid having your fishing rods laying all over by integrating a rod storage system. While an enclosed area is preferred, rod holders along the inside of the boat's gunwales are certainly adequate and make a huge difference in boat clutter. Take a page from the world of fiberglass bass boats and equip your jonboat with a comfortable pedestal seat. It will make your fishing day more relaxed, enjoyable and give you more time on the water.

Fiberglass boats

Fishing from a classic fiberglass bass boat can be a great experience. However, making sure that it is designed right for your fishing needs is essential. Start out by choosing a quality engine. Four-stroke engines are more environmentally friendly and pollute less. While still a bit more expensive, your maintenance will be easier. If you're looking to make driving the boat easier, consider adding a foot pedal to control your engine speed instead of a classic hand controlled throttle. When choosing your fishing electronics for your bass boat, make sure that it includes a mapping feature. You'll want to be able to see where you are on a lake or reservoir. Utilizing a device that offers the ability to add lake maps and different map options is important for both upgrading your ability to fish local waters in the future and travelling with your boat to destinations to fish. Consider getting a second screen for your bass boat to place near the trolling motor. This will let you see what's going on while you fish without having to run back to the main console to check. While most bass anglers now consider a trolling motor a must have, some still skimp on the model that they choose. If you need to spend less, don't do it on your trolling motor. While getting a smaller main engine will slow down your cross-lake run, an underpowered trolling motor can make your fishing painful. Splurge and get yourself a nice model, along with more battery power than you think that you'll need. Thinking about anchors? While old favorites abound, there are some new models on the market, specifically the types that allow you to press a button and vertically anchor in place with a pole or rod. These can make your life easier but are certainly not on the must-have list. Most fiberglass bass boats come with a standard livewell, but it can be worthwhile having two livewells to increase your capacity as well as sort fish or hold bait. When you're picking out seating for your boat, try out all of the seats before you buy. This is especially true for pedestal seating and can make a big difference in your comfort on a long day of fishing. ☐

Thanks to Tom Ritter, Steve Hancock and Bass Pro Shops for input and the opportunities to photograph their boats and equipment.



This depth finder offers the ability to show water depth, suspended fish and water temperature. It also has an integrated GPS and mapping capability. On unfamiliar waters, this type of unit will both find fish and help you boat safely.



Rod storage is an important component of outfitting your bass boat. Use a closed container to make travel easier, but make sure it can keep the rods separate for easy removal.



A front mounted trolling motor is a great option for bass boats of any variety. Most bass anglers consider it required equipment. Add an extra depth finder display up front to allow you to check depth and find fish while you operate your trolling motor.



A jet drive motor is useful in many shallow rivers like the Susquehanna, Delaware, Juniata and more. Keep your aluminum bass boat fishing and problem free in rocky situations with a jet.