J-24 Used Boat Buyer's Guide

While you are virtually guaranteed a trouble-free boat if you purchase a new one, with some careful planning and time invested, a used J/24 can be brought up to current standards very economically. Furthermore, upgrading a used boat can be spread over several seasons so that less of your money is tied up at the start. That extra money in your pocket will also come in handy for things you didn't know you needed such as replacing halyards, a VHF and, of course, regatta entry fees. J/Boats has done a commendable job at keeping this truly a One-Design class. Anyone saying that a new boat is necessary for success should take note that Ken Read wins in a 1981 J/24 (hull #2934), Geoff Moore in a 1978 (hull #456) and recently I was part of the winning crew at the Buzzards Bay Regatta on a 1982 J/24 (hull #3314).

Used J/24s turn up for sail in all kinds of places and from many sources. Boatyards, backyards, publications, friends and strangers. Don't limit your search, as you may miss a jewel.

SET REALISTIC BUDGET

While setting up your budget, start with the price of the boat itself, add a trailer, modifications, (keel, hull, paint, etc..), hardware, electronics and sails. These added together give you the "all-up" price of the boat. Set up a spreadsheet for comparing the all up prices for the boats you see. THIS ALL-UP PRICE IS THE ONLY ONE WHICH MATTERS. You are not assured of getting a better boat just because you spend more money.

You should look at as many boats as possible. Look at boats within a plus/minus 50% price range of your budget. In other words, if you wish to pay $10,000 for the boat before any modifications, inspect boats advertised from $5,000 to $15,000. YOU CANNOT LOOK AT TOO MANY BOATS. You might be surprised at the similarity of many boats in the $8,000 to $14,000 range. Naturally, a person who has had some work done on the boat, installed a sailcomp and has a reasonably good suit of sails will try to get as much of his/her investment back as possible. Your number one objective as a buyer should be to buy the most structurally sound boat you can find for the price. Re-coring the deck and replacing bulkheads is very expensive and can throw your budget out the window.

The first place to begin your search is local fleets and newsletters. These boats will be nearby and will give you a good feel for what is available in your price range. Once you've inspected a few local boats, begin spreading your search area, including the J/24 Class' newsletter Waterlines and, if you go to regattas outside of your area, you can probably see several more boats. As you look at more boats, your initial budget should change. You may find that you want to pay less for the boat and more for modifications or that your budget is unrealistic. As someone in the repair industry, however, I would advise you to spend as much of your budget as possible on the best boat structurally. This will give you the best possible return years down the road. Look beyond cosmetics. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with a faded brown boat with brushed-on bottom paint and a big, ugly name on both sides.

TIME FRAME FOR SEARCH

The more time the better. I cannot emphasize enough that J/24s daysailed two seasons and stored unused for five years are out there for less than $10,000. You may not be able to find one for two years, but they do pop up. Realistically, allow three to four months for the search and one more month for getting the boat set up and performing modifications.

This boat, found in an Annapolis boatyard, is waiting for a new owner. It appears to have an appropriate name already.

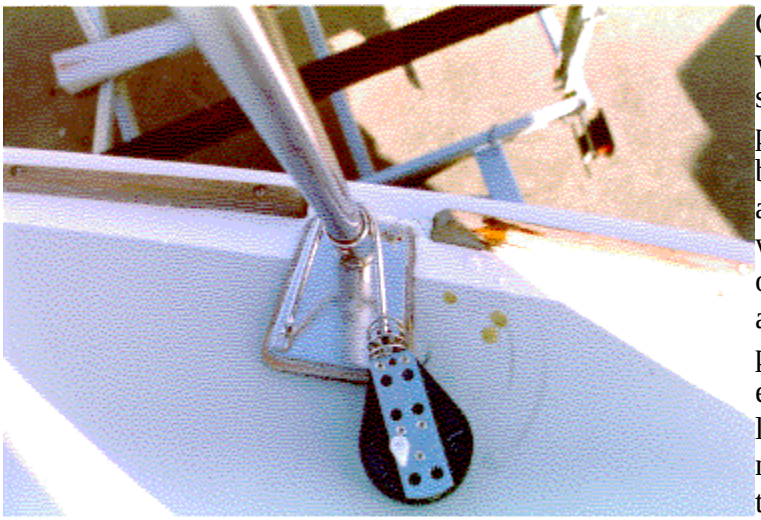
Look in the spring but don't buy until the fall. If you conduct your search in the fall and winter, as sailing season approaches you will find yourself inclined to buy and get in the water for the races. Whereas if you have narrowed your choices to three or four boats in October, you are not under any pressure to buy, as the season is still months away. The best time to have work done on the boat is the summer, as demand is low. This is not very practical, however. The fall is the next best time and will allow you to do any prep work which you are doing yourself before the spring rush. If at all possible, avoid having work done in the spring or you may pay a premium.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR NON-RACED

I feel that it is beneficial to buy a boat that has not been raced or has been raced only minimally. First of all, such a boat will probably not have been abused or worked as hard as a raced boat. Secondly, the seller will not be trying to recoup money invested in sails, hardware, etc. Finally, these boats typically are less expensive because the seller does not realize what he or she has. In other words, a person actively sailing a J/24 knows that if it is in average condition, demand has driven the prices up to around $15,000. Someone who bought a new J/24 five years ago and day-sailed it only and is not a class member will look in the BUC book (similar to the N.A.D.A. car book) and see a value of $10,000 to $13,500. The buyer also stands a better chance of finding a day-sailed boat which hasn't been sailed for a few years, which will benefit the buyer's

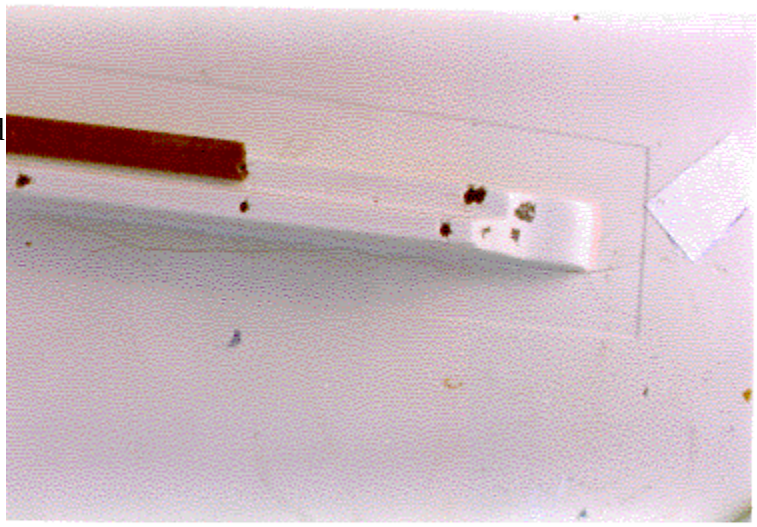
negotiations. Conversely, someone selling a boat which has won a few regattas will try to use their race results to increase the asking price.

STRUCTURAL/VISUAL INSPECTION ABOVE THE WATERLINE



Stanchions and bases are particularly suceptible to damage. Notice the cracks that run under the base of this stanchion - a good clue that there may be some damage. But notice how carefully the holes from old harware have been filled.

Grasp each stanchion firmly and wiggle it athwartships. Watch the stanchion base as you do this. The play should be minimal. Look out for bases which you can see moving like a loose tooth. This usually indicates wet core under the stanchion. Cracks on deck are fairly common, especially around radii and curves (ie. mast partners, companionway, cockpit, etc.) As a rule of thumb, if the cracks look like light pencil marks, there may not be any core damage. If, however, the cracks are darker and wider, some wet core is likely to be present. Look at the stanchion, pushpit and pulpit bases, they should be flat on the deck and the bases should not be bent (indicating they took a hit). Inspect the area of the deck right around the winch pads. Check that the pads are not compressing into the deck. Finally, while on deck, make sure that all holes (from removing hardware) have been filled properly. Make sure that the holes were filled with gelcoat or epoxy. Silicone should not be used to fill holes on the deck.



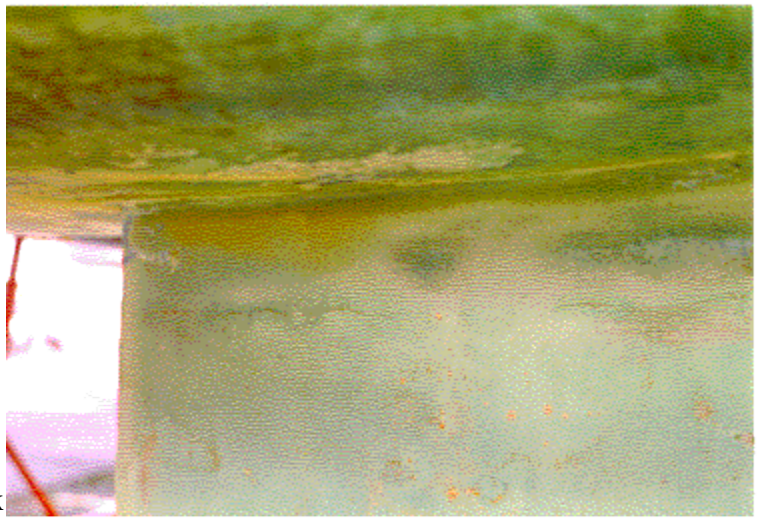
During your inspection of the deck, take note of unfilled holes and cracks near radii and curves. These are clues to possible deck-core damage.

Before climbing into the cabin, try to have as much gear removed from the boat as possible. Open all cabinets and lift out the seven bunk boards. Look around the ceiling at the edge of the companionway and foredeck hatch. Look for cracks and yellow or brown discoloration, indicating water absorption. A very minimal bit of rust coloring around fasteners in the ceiling is common and not a concern. However, brown discoloration in the gelcoat is a telltale sign of core damage. Keep in mind that a J/24 is a three piece boat comprised of a deck, hull and interior liner. Bulkheads tie the pieces together. Inspect the tabbing (the strips of fiberglass which holds the pieces together) for cracks and de-lamination. This is relatively inexpensive to repair, but will add to the cost of

preparing the boat. The chainplates are through-bolted to the main bulkhead. Inspect the forward face of the bulkhead for signs of wear, softness and discoloration. The forward face of this bulkhead is marine plywood and wetness of the wood is to be avoided. While in the V-berth, look at the hull for any gelcoat which doesn't match the surrounding area. This is an indication of previous repairs involving holes. The same inspection should be performed in the shelves, cockpit lazarettes, and up on deck.

Finally, while inside the boat, lift off the sump cover (floorboard liftout). Ensure that the stringers (small bulkheads running athwartship) are not cracked. Look for cracks and see if the keelbolts are compressing into the vermiculite or fiberglass.

STRUCTURAL/VISUAL INSPECTION BELOW THE WATERLINE



Here is an ugly bottom, but the paint can be removed with relatively little effort. The feature on this keel which causes concern is the crack where the lead keel is bolted to the fiberglass stub, about 153mm down from the hull.

Try to look at your prospects out of the water. Normally, boats kept in the water probably have bottom paint on them. Boats that are dry-sailed (launched and hauled each time they sail) are more likely to have bare gelcoat or epoxy finishes on the bottom. Either way, inspect the whole surface of the bottom. Look for cracks or blisters. Most blisters are very small. If the boat sits on a trailer inspect under the supports, this is a common place for blistering to begin. Bottom paint can hide blisters, so look closely. If you suspect blistering, you should have a surveyor or repair facility inspect it. Next, look at the keel. Does it appear to have grounded? Are there cracks? Any water leaking out? Check around the top of the keel at the keel/hull joint (153mm down the trailing edge). If the boat has grounded, cracks appear on the centerline, in front of and behind the keel. This is not always serious but should be noted as a potential problem. Last, check the rudder. Look for cracks up the leading edge between the pintles. **(See photo at the end of this article for an example)** Also, inspect around the pintles, look for cracks or rusty water leaking out from the bolts. The older rudders can be indentified by the bolts on the pintles being in a straight line. Newer rudders have a staggered bolt pattern. **(See photo at the end of this article for an example)** Factor in only the overall condition, whether it be bottom paint, gelcoat or epoxy. Bottom paint can be removed. Gelcoat and epoxy can be coated with bottom paint.

Touch everything you will be buying. Feel every halyard, shroud, sheet and block. Do they feel right? Is the mast straight? A block here, a halyard there and pretty soon you're talking real money. At up to $90 per halyard, $500 can go pretty fast. Look at the shrouds where they are swaged to fittings there should be no frays or kinks. If you have any concerns, make a drawing

and take notes. A good rigger has seen it all. He/she will understand what you are describing and will know what is or is not serious.

Naturally, if the owner seems to have taken great care to keep the trailer clean and the woodwork nice, he/she has probably taken good care of other aspects as well.

SAILS

Do not let the sails become a negotiating tool for the seller. If the seller tells you that the sails are worth $2,000, tell him or her that you do not want the sails and ask if you can deduct $2,000 from the price. YOU WILL NEED A NEW SUIT OF SAILS WITHIN TWO YEARS ANYWAY. If you do feel that the sails on the boat are worth having or if the seller is adamant about the value of the sails, have them inspected by a loft. Ken Read of Sobstad New England points out that most sailmakers offer a sail inspection and picture analysis (in which the used sails are flown and photographed and compared to pictures of a new sail) at a minimal cost. Keep in mind that the sails are of no use to the seller once the boat is sold. But as mentioned previously, your number one concern is the condition of the boat itself. Remain focused on that and don't be swayed by things you will replace anyway.

TRAILER

A new trailer will cost between $1500 and $2000, depending on options. Do try to buy a boat with a good trailer, as used J/24 trailers are nearly impossible to find. Remember your spreadsheet and add the cost of a trailer to the all-up price, if needed. If you do not intend to travel more than a few hours to regattas, a single axle trailer is sufficient. But if you plan to do much interstate travelling, seriously consider a tandem axle. The down side of a tandem axle is that it is nearly impossible for the crew to maneuver without a vehicle.

You must decide how important a trailer is to you. In this yard, boats are launched with a huge forklift. Here, a wooden cradle is great for a local racer, but just try to hit the road with that cradle.

DRYSAIL vs. MOORED
SALT VS. FRESHWATER

Many people seem willing to pay a premium for a freshwater boat. It is true that salt air will corrode hardware, electronics and the rig faster than fresh water air. However, fresh water may actually cause osmotic blistering on the hull faster than salt water. This is due to the fact that salt water is denser than fresh. Bear with me here. Remember that we are most concerned with the hull and deck (the boat proper if you will), when purchasing. If you race, friction and loading will destroy your hardware before the salt water will. As hard as I tried to get them to, two design firms, two builders and a supplier of fiberglass, cores and resins would not say that salt water attacked the laminates any more aggressively than fresh water. (It should be noted here that I am assuming that the owners of boats in saltwater rinsed the hardware down with fresh

water as hardware manufacturers suggest). To sum up, saltwater is tougher on metals but equal to [and possibly less harmful than] freshwater on the hull. Don't pay extra.

More importantly, try to buy a dry-sailed boat as opposed to one which is moored. There are three reasons for this. First, it will cost you to have the bottom paint stripped off or take up at least two of your weekends, (if you don't think so, I have several customers who have told me to have you call them). Secondly, the boat will absorb water while moored. If the boat was weighed in the spring, (as is typical) and corrector weights installed, the boat will be several kilos heavier as the season progresses. Contrary to popular belief, the winter is the best season for drying out the boat as the air is drier. If the boat is dry-sailed, it typically will not pick up much weight during the season. Finally, out of sight is out of mind. It is difficult to ignore the condition of the bottom and keel of a dry-sailed boat.

MISCELLANEOUS

In 1980, Tillotson-Pearson, Inc. (T.P.I.) implemented two major construction changes on J/24s. The new style hatches appeared and vermiculite was removed from the sumps. This occurred at roughly hull #1900. If at all possible, buy a post-vermiculite/old hatches boat. This will save you from making these conversions later, (about $4500). In my experience as a J/24 measurer, these older boats tend to be heavier and require less corrector weight. This brings up a good point. As you look at boats, ask the owner if he/she has a measurement certificate. If they do, look at the last three items on the certificate: Dry weight without correctors, weight of correctors and basic yacht weight dry. If two boats are equal all other ways, take the boat requiring the most corrector weight. You should, however, get the complete hull numbers from the transoms and contact T.P.I. and ask for the builder's weights. Use these to verify that one boat is heavier than the other (before correctors are added). Please note that the weight on the measurement certificate and the builder's weight will not be the same but if one boat requires more correctors, it should have a lighter builder's weight.

TYPICAL CHANGES & MODIFICATIONS

Don't be put off by a boat requiring some repair work. Do, however, make sure that the cost of these repairs is included in your spread sheet. I am not going to list prices for spars, hardware, electronics, etc., and I am assuming that all of the boats have safety gear, engines, etc...

Call your favorite loft and price out a suit of sails. Consider a suit of sails which has been used for one regatta most lofts have these in stock at very good prices.

Once repairs are out of the way, you should consider modifications. Remember that these modifications need not be completed all at once. Our most common modifications are Awlgripping (painting) the topsides (waterline to shear), stripping all bottom paint, fairing keels and hulls, applying bottom finishes (bottom paint for moored boats and epoxy for drysailed boats), removing vermiculite, wetsanding the bottom finishes, filling old through-hulls and compass holes and modifying deck hardware layouts. Add these into the all-up price so that each prospective boat is in equal condition.

CLOSING THE DEAL

Now look at your chart. Once all things have been considered, which is the least expensive boat?

Assuming that three or so boats are close in all-up price, ask other J/24 owners to recommend a yard to perform the modifications. Then, make the yard earn its money. Have the yard representative inspect the final choices with you. Try to have the seller inside his or her house so that you may speak freely. The repairer may notice some things you haven't, and he/she will be able to give you a rough idea of the cost of repairs on the spot. Plug these numbers into your spread sheet. At this point, the all-up price is all that matters. If you have done it properly, the all-up price for each boat implies that they are all in identical condition after necessary repairs and modifications. Therefore, the boat with the lowest all-up price is the one you want.

You may now begin the wonderful process of haggling with the sellers. Assuming you still have more than one boat under consideration, you are in a good negotiating position. Make it clear to the seller that if you do not buy his or her boat, you will buy one of the others. See if the owner of the boat with the lowest all-up price (boat one) will sell for less. See if any other contenders will come down to a price equal to or lower than the all-up price of boat one. Don't rush the final negotiations. Some of your prospects may sell before you make an offer. Don't let this worry you. One of the beauties of this class is that boats are available all over the country. As a result, there are plenty of used boats to choose from. Ask lots of questions, you will be learning a lot. Speak with sailmakers, boat yards and other owners. The contacts you make will be valuable down the road. Good luck.

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About the Author: Gordon Borges is Vice-President of Waterline Systems, Inc., a marine repair business. Waterline Systems operates facilities in Bristol, RI. Since its inception in 1988, Waterline has worked on literally hundreds of J/24s. Gordon is active in J/24 Fleet 50, sailing a 1983 J/24 #3314 Blind Squirrel. Gordon is District 2 Governor and is a certified class measurer.