



Which is right for you: Outboard vs Inboard?

Many boats, including bowriders, deck boats and cabin cruisers, are offered with a choice of outboard or inboard power. When both options are available, is there a better choice between the two? Here's a look at inboard vs outboard motors, and dig a little deeper into the advantages and disadvantages of each type of power.

Family boats with **inboard power** are almost always equipped with a sterndrive (sometimes called an inboard/outboard or I/O) powertrain, which combines an automotive-type engine mounted inside the boat with a steerable and trimable drive unit mounted on the stern (the back) of the boat.

The exception would be for a dedicated watersports tow boat, which has an inboard engine turning a propeller under the boat, with steering control provided by a rudder.



power than the biggest pair of sterndrive engines available, resulting in performance that was once unimaginable.

Initial Cost Comparison

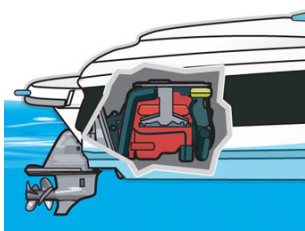
It seems natural to make a cost comparison based on horsepower—a 250 HP outboard to a 250 HP sterndrive in the same boat—but it's smarter to make that comparison based on

performance.

In this example, a 200 HP outboard will usually match the performance of a 250 HP sterndrive, simply because the outboard weighs less, and because that weight is more efficiently positioned behind, rather than inside, the boat. This rule of thumb holds true as you move up and down the horsepower scale. However, even with less horsepower the outboard-powered boat will often cost a little more—2 to 4 percent—than a similar boat with a sterndrive.

STERNDRIVES

Sterndrives are currently offered from 200 horsepower (HP) to 430 HP, but many compact runabouts on the pre-owned market may be powered by a 130-horsepower sterndrive that is no longer in production.



OUTBOARDS

An **outboard motor** is a dedicated marine engine that is attached directly to the stern of a boat.

Outboards are available from tiny 2-horsepower kickers to 600 HP, but for family boating the range is typically 90 to 300 HP. As outboard motors have become more powerful, they are gaining popularity on larger cabin cruiser and day boats that once were always equipped with inboard engines.

These may be rigged with three or four outboards that combined make more



Inboard vs. Outboard Maintenance Costs & Ownership

Because it will usually weigh less and be a more-efficient design, an outboard motor will typically deliver better fuel economy than a sterndrive. Both will require similar annual maintenance, except that in cold climates the cooling system of most sterndrive engines needs to be flushed with antifreeze solution, usually by a marine service center.

- An outboard is self-draining and many owners can accomplish their own off-season service.

- Sterndrives once had a reputation for being more prone to corrosion-related issues in salt water, but corrosion resistance is much improved on modern engines and outdrives, and many can be equipped with a closed cooling system that keeps most saltwater out of the engine.

- However, most sterndrives can not be tilted completely out of the water, while most outboards can clear the water when tilted all the way up. This is an advantage for the outboard if the boat is docked or moored full time in saltwater, as it prevents marine growth and corrosion from occurring on the drive.

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