5 TIPS: Find Your Perfect Trawler

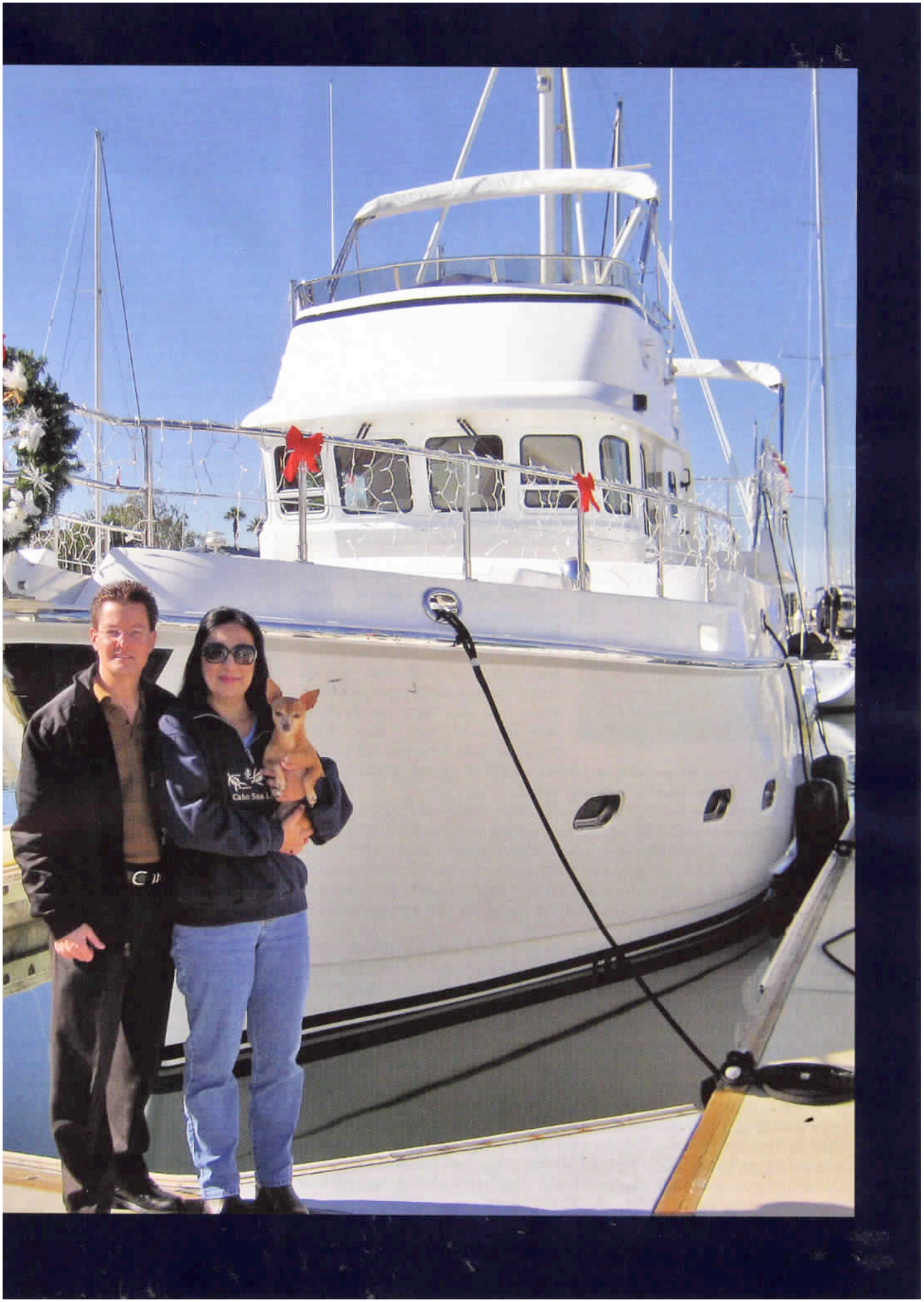
AVOID THESE PITFALLS TO MAKE SURE YOU GET THE RIGHT BOAT FOR YOU.

By John Torelli

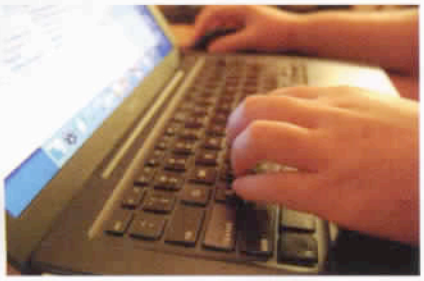
John and Maria Torelli still enjoy their current Nordhavn even as they make plans to purchase their third trawler.

How many people do you know who purchase enough boats in a lifetime to become experts at it? Not many. Because of that, the possibility of making a mistake during the boat-buying process is always lurking. My wife, Maria, and I have commissioned two new Nordhavn trawlers and lived aboard one part-time for the last five years, and we still feel like novices as we consider purchasing our third boat.

We've learned a lot along the way and talked to other trawler owners who made a mistake or two. To help us and others, we've kept a list of the things we would have done differently or avoided altogether. The top five mistakes on our list may help you when the time comes to buy your first (or second or third) trawler, though the advice applies to other kinds of boats. ➡



1 SETTING UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.



This is probably the easiest mistake to avoid as long as you are willing to do your homework and collect and analyze the information required to make accurate decisions. Our approach starts with some serious soul searching and honest discussion about how we plan to use the boat over the next three years. Three years out is as far as we like to project due to life's countless changes. Once we have an agreed-upon plan, the search begins for the perfect boat and builder.

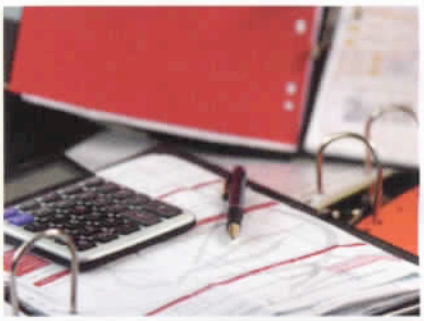
When it comes to the boat itself, hull design, safety and comfort make up our top three considerations. Since we know that up front, we look at the builders we think will satisfy those demands and we make a list. Once we have identified the prospective builders, we research each company and its product line. We use the Internet, magazines and boat shows to narrow our search to one or two builders, a process we can complete in about a year.

With a short list in hand, we run sea trials on those models. Understanding the handling characteristics of the boat is important, and we take sea trials seriously. There is always time to evaluate the static aspects of a boat while it sits at the dealer's dock, so we schedule long sea trials and hope for sloppy weather to put the boat through its paces. After the tests, we discuss how the boat measured up to our expectations and try to envision ourselves on the boat for days or weeks at a time. Even after making a decision we're comfortable with, we address our expectations one more time.

When we purchased our first 40-foot Nordhavn, we thought about taking a weeklong, 1,000-mile cruise from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas. Only after we had the boat for about a year did my first mate decide a weeklong cruise exceeded her threshold for fun. The boat remained the right choice and exceeded our technical expectations, but we had to rethink how we were going to use it.

2 PURCHASING THE WRONG TYPE OF TRAWLER.

We came close to committing this error. Know how you're going to use the boat. We knew we would live aboard *Maria Elena* part-time thanks to a job transfer (some guys do get lucky). Given that fact, living space was a concern. Maria had no issues with the quality or layout of the boat, but she would have preferred more room. Our budget limited us to the smallest model in the Nordhavn displacement-hull fleet, and I was not willing to give up the quality and safety for a larger boat from a different builder. Since the layout is perfect for a cou-



3 UNDERESTIMATING THE COST OF OWNERSHIP.

When we started researching our first trawler, we had a heck of a time locating accurate, up-to-date, well-documented information on the subject of costs beyond the boat payment. We had visions of long summer cruises, barbecues on the aft deck and margaritas at sunset. What we got was a dose of bottom cleaning and replacing hull zincs. That cuts into margarita time. Factor in monthly slip fees, insurance, boat washing, semi-annual waxing, property taxes, fuel, oil changes, spare parts, satellite TV and radio, and it adds up. That's all on top of the monthly boat payment. The cost of ownership was higher than we expected.

asked her to settle in for a nine-hour ride at 6.5 knots. I told her about a cartoon that mirrored our situation: A snail sits on a turtle's back, wind in its face, moving faster than snails are accustomed to and says "Wee." In our case, we were the snail and *Maria Elena* was the turtle. It got worse when sailboats passed us. Fortunately, Maria came to appreciate the journey rather than the destination. Make sure the boat fits you and moves at the right pace. If it doesn't, it's bound to sit in its slip and nobody's happy.

ple (and occasional guests), things have worked out.

An area that didn't work out as well was the speed of a boat with a full displacement hull. Maria is used to fast cars and day boats. I should have expected resistance when I

4 NOT GETTING YOUR FIRST MATE'S APPROVAL.

This guarantees a disaster at sea. Even with the right boat, a big enough budget to afford *QE II* and the best relationship, a couple will find itself in trouble if spending time on the water is not an equal passion. The secret to the fine art of trawler ownership is the same as the secret to a good marriage: compromise. But if one person does all the compromising, will that person be happy in the future? We've managed to escape the fate of many couples — if year-old million-dollar trawlers for sale are any indication — because we've compromised.

5 BUYING ON EMOTION.

Emotion is part of the great boating adventure. It's what sparks the initial interest, but it needs to be backed up with reason. Boat-buying veterans and newbies alike should look at the big picture, do some research and test some boats before committing to a major purchase. Take your time and do your homework. Even after you've found the perfect boat and both parties are on board, step away for a week or so; then ask yourself if you still want to take on the trawler lifestyle. If the answer is still yes, then start your journey.

John and Maria Torelli are San Diego-based boaters and the authors of "Life Is a Journey, Why Not Live Aboard a Trawler."

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