

What Makes a Boat Great?

I live on Cane River Lake in Louisiana and yet for me catching fish here has always been a challenge! I'm not sure why because I've caught countless fish in other lakes, rivers, and ponds. Recently my brother and I were privileged to be invited to go fishing with our friend Dean Lewis. Dean moved to the states to work on boats, fish tournaments, and marry Susanna, or as he calls her, Suzie. Susanna is a friend from our church who introduced him to us. He's a very kind guy and probably has the coolest accent I've heard. He's from Zimbabwe, Africa and so his voice sounds like a mixture of Crocodile Dundee and Michael Caine. Dean has participated in multiple tournaments, and the boat he drives is one that he won in a tournament. It's a Skeeter bass boat with a Yamaha 150 VMAX outboard motor. The Skeeter is significantly larger and more stable than the Jon boat I usually fish from. It is just awesome!

My fishing rig is a 14-foot Express Jon Boat with a tiller-steered Mercury 25 horsepower outboard on the back. I do love my boat. My dad bought my Jon boat from an old timer who had inherited it from his brother. It was my first fishing boat! My dad helped me cut plywood to floor it and my mom smeared the carpet glue on the outdoor carpet covering. We rewired everything, put in an onboard charger, and added a few accessories including blue LED lighting for night fishing. It was during the boat overhaul that we officially got to know Dean when he came and worked on the carburetor and tuned up the engine. Another of my accessories I thought was great was my Garmin fish finder. Then I saw Dean's! Dean's boat has two fish finders and they aren't the cheap ones. The one firmly seated on the console is one of the top Lowrance fish finders money can buy. The other one, located on the bow near the trolling motor, is also a high

quality Lowrance. When Dean invited us to fish with him, my brother and I were very excited and hoping to learn some new fishing tips from a pro while seeing what it was like to fish from a real bass boat.

It was a cold day and my thoughts as we pulled off the pier were somewhat negative. Dean decided to show us how fast his boat could go! I had never gone fifty-five in a boat before. In fact, I hadn't even gone forty. Thirty miles per hour is probably my boat's top speed and I used to consider that fast. Without sunglasses fifty-five miles per hour isn't a totally fun experience, because there are usually a large quantity of bugs and wind striking your face. Despite the projectiles, the speed was exhilarating! We stopped far down the river and prepared to fish. Dean opened his awesome rod locker and asked if we knew how to use bait-casting reels. In case you're wondering, a bait-casting reel is a fishing reel with the top open so the spool can run freely when casting a lure. This makes it a more difficult reel to use, because you must get a feel for when to put your thumb on the spool and slow it down to avoid a giant embarrassing backlash. We replied yes, that we knew how, and he handed us each a professional bass rig. The three of us shifted around the boat to make our first casts. Dean went to the front and dropped his Minn Kota Ultrex trolling motor. We fished along for some time before Dean jerked his rod back with the kind of swift movement that only an experienced fisherman can do, just enough for us to see that the hook remained but the lure was gone. Telling us in his cool accent that he had gotten a solid bite Dean turned around and grabbed his tackle box out of the roomy under-deck storage where he kept his soft plastic lures. As he went to rig a new lure, Dean pressed a button on the remote control for his trolling motor. The motor turned in various directions, and the boat amazingly stayed in place

despite the wind. He had activated spot lock. This is another of the many features that my boat is lacking. As we kept fishing, we came upon a Cypress tree with thick branches hanging over the water. Dean cast his line out. And then, just when no one was expecting it, he jerked his rod back once again, but this time he had hooked the fish! He brought the fish to the side of the boat and lifted it in! It was an impressive fish, and surprising since conditions that day weren't favorable for catching fish. When it was time to head back home, we settled comfortably back into our deeply cushioned seats and enjoyed the ride.

This was the first of many great fishing trips that I've gone on with Dean. On that first trip, I was in awe of Dean's equipment and skills. Since then I have kept working on my fishing skills and on perfecting my sweet Zimbabwe accent. Even with all it's fine, impressive fishing gadgets and high-tech equipment, I am not sure I would trade my old boat for Dean's. My plain old Jon boat has one crucial thing that his lacks - awesome blue accent lighting to impress the ladies when you take them out for the Christmas Festival fireworks on Cane River Lake! Maybe it's no wonder I can't catch any fish here!