

HIGH TECH AND TRICKED-OUT AT AKRON SHOW

If upgraded boat designs and the latest in technology are hot buttons for today's boaters, they'll be heading for the first-ever Akron Boat & Water Sports Show in the John S. Knight Center, Friday thru Sunday, March 3-5.

Whether you're a die-hard wake-boarder, love the freedom of paddle boarding or get a charge from speeding along on a personal watercraft, this show is being staged to scratch your itch! There's no question manufacturers are creating sexier products such as wake-sports boats, for example, designed to enhance certain experiences.

Other updated technology on sports boats includes large state-of-the-art music speakers. And, how about the latest models that come with a wristwatch that allows someone on a wakeboard or water skis to actually control the boat's wake.

These days, hot looks matter, too. Show visitors will see many new models in bold colors with sparkles and bright stripes meant to turn heads on the water. The newest sporty model from MasterCraft and others have sleek silver racks meant for holding equipment such as water skis and wake boards. Dealers featuring these boats at the show will include Portage Lakes Marine, Ravenna Marine, Boat Masters Marine, and Buckeye Sports Center, to name some.

Some say the high-tech trend is aimed specifically for an active, younger generation, namely the millennials. Like most consumer-driven industries, boat dealers are working hard to appeal to the coveted 18-to-34-year-old set. But, the fact is the deeper-pocketed baby boomers are also buying up these boats. What all ages are discovering is these aren't their parents' old boats anymore.

That's not to say the new Akron show will only feature sports boats. There will be plenty of boats designed for kick-back comfort, from sleek runabouts to the latest pontoons. Indeed, there are now Tritoons (a third float chamber) pontoons, powered by 200-plus-horsepower outboards that can pull skiers and tubers around the lake all day long.

Clearly, when it comes to pontoons, the show will boast everything from \$15,000 basic models to the ultra-fancy models for more than \$50,000 that feature soft leather couches, functional wet bars, mood-setting illumination, motorized mooring covers and a lot more. Major pontoon dealers including Charles Mill Marina (Starcraft, Apex, Quest, Sunchaser); Atwood Lake Boats (Harris, AquaPatio); Boat Masters (Bennington); and Ravenna Marine (Manitou), among others, will be displaying them.

When it comes to affordability, personal watercraft really fit the bill. Called PWC's or water scooters, these range from standup models to three-seaters, and come with a variety of horsepower options. Some PWC's, such as BRP's Sea-Doo Spark, start around \$5,000.

Dealers compare buying a boat to buying a car, with easy financing and low-interest rates. Less expensive boats can mean a monthly payment as low as \$150 to \$170, depending on the down payment, which is usually dramatically less than the typical car payment.

Show hours will be: Opening Friday (3/3) 12 Noon to 9:00 pm; Saturday (3/4) 10:00 am to 9:00 pm; Sunday (3/5) 10:00 am to 6:00 pm. Admission: \$5.00 Adults; Children 12 & under Free.

For the latest show schedules, go to www.akronboatshow.com