



JUST BOATING

Getting the Right Start

Bill L. Olson

In the opening greeting of the Boat Texas study handbook, Texas Parks & Wildlife Education Director Steve Hall states that the Lone Star State has more than 1,260,000 surface acres of freshwater lakes, 2,111,000 surface acres of saltwater bays, and some 80,000 miles of rivers and streams. Additionally, there are miles of open blue water out in the Gulf of Mexico.

With all that water, it is no wonder there are more than 619,000 boaters in Texas. However a number of those may be new to boating or lack the experience and skills to handle their craft in situations ranging from ordinary to extreme. Unfortunately the way many gain boating experience comes from "the school of hard knocks." However there is a better way.

Unless you are a licensed captain, the first thing any boater should take is a boating safety course. In Texas it is required for anyone born after August 31, 1984, however that requirement goes away once the individual reaches the age of 18. It is unfortunate that the State Legislature had a good idea when this law was drafted and passed, but failed to really address the majority of those operating boats on Texas' waters.

It's further ironic that we have to have hands-on training and pass a driving test to operate a motor vehicle, but neither is required to operate a boat that in some cases can reach speeds in excess of 50-60 miles per



Jason Jones, of Boater's World in Webster, says a bucket with a potty seat and liner can prove useful.

hour. There is further irony in that even the most inexperienced motor vehicle operator knows where the brake is located. A boat has no brake.

Fortunately help is available. Some instruction may be available from an experienced boater. However, it is wise to make sure of the true experience level of this help and that is where the Boating Safety Course proves

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