What to feel for on the sea trial

The rest of this brief you can look up, ask about, or measure. This you can't. How she handles and how she feels to live on are things you only learn aboard, not off a page. So these are questions to answer for yourself, not answers we'll invent for you.

One caveat before the list: you rarely get to pick the day. Most sea trials happen in whatever weather turns up. That's usually calm, which is exactly when a hull behaves its best. If you don't get real water, don't score the motion questions as passed. Write down what the day could NOT tell you and treat those as still open, the same way an unverified number stays unverified in the rest of this brief. If motion matters to you and the day is flat, make your own water rather than hoping for a second outing. Run circles across your own wake to get her beam-on, and head for the roughest water the day offers while you're still out there. Brokers will grant a second sea trial to re-check a fault, not to re-check a feeling. And ask the owner directly how she behaves beam-on to a two-foot chop.

UNDERWAY: HOW SHE ACTUALLY BEHAVES

- [ ] Beam-on to the swell: does she roll easy, or snap back hard? A quick, jerky roll is what wears people out over a season. You can't read it off a spec sheet.
- [ ] Quartering and following seas: does the stern wander, does she bow-steer, how much wheel does it take to hold a line?
- [ ] Take your hands off the wheel for ten seconds at cruise. Does she track, or immediately fall off?
- [ ] Run at the speed you'll ACTUALLY do the Loop: the efficient cruise you'd hold for hours, not wide open. Note the noise, the vibration, and whether she's happy there.
- [ ] Watch the trim through the RPM range and note any speed where she squats, porpoises, or won't settle. Every hull has speeds it likes and ones it doesn't; find this one's.

AT THE HELM: YOU'LL BE HERE SIX HOURS A DAY

- [ ] Sightlines: can you see the bow, and the corners you'll need when docking?
- [ ] Seat, wheel and throttle geometry: standing AND sitting. A helm that only works standing gets old by Kentucky.
- [ ] Can you hold a normal conversation at cruise RPM? If not, that's every day of the trip.
- [ ] Where does the sun land, and where would you actually sit when it rains?

CLOSE QUARTERS: LOCKS AND DOCKS

- [ ] Prop walk: which way, and how much? You'll use it in every lock.
- [ ] Reverse: does she stop where you expect, and back predictably?
- [ ] Practice holding station in a crosswind. That's the lock wall.
- [ ] Stand where you'd handle lines. Can you reach a lock wall from there, and get back to the helm?

AT REST: WHERE MOST OF THE HOURS GO

- [ ] Roll at anchor, and how she reacts to a passing wake. This is the difference between sleeping and not.
- [ ] Genset and A/C noise from inside the berth, not from the dock.
- [ ] Sit in the saloon and imagine three rainy days. Does the space still work?

AFTERWARDS, WHILE IT'S FRESH

Write down what bothered you before you talk yourself out of it. The things people regret are almost never the ones that showed up on the survey. They're the ones they noticed on the trial, decided they'd get used to, and didn't.

Free from Can I Loop? (www.caniloop.net), which does the same job for the rest of a boat search. Copy it, print it, pass it on.