

SO YOU WANT TO OWN A GAME FISHING BOAT...

I thought that for those of you smart enough not to have chosen game boat ownership as a means of disposing of your spare change, this little treatise might be enlightening...

If your non-game fishing spouse, partner, banker or accountant is reading this over your shoulder, send them out of the room now!

It's also good to read this if you're crewing and angling on a game fishing boat, and wonder why the skipper looks relieved when you offer to help him out with fuel costs for the day out on the continental shelf.

That said, of course you can't go out game fishing on your own – at least not if you're smart, and not if you want anything you catch to count towards club point scores. At the risk of opening by stating the blindingly obvious, it therefore goes that gamefishing – both boat ownership, and boat crewing – is very much a symbiotic business, because a boat owner and skipper can't make it all work on his own, and a keen game fisherman without a game boat has obviously made a bad choice of recreational activity unless he or she is prepared to crew someone else's boat. It goes without even reading what's been written below, that crewing on a boat is definitely an extremely cost-effective way to get into this great sport where equipment is everything, and there's lots of it required.

I'll use my own single-engine 26ft Black Watch pocket game boat as the template for this exercise, but you don't have to be a rocket scientist to be able to figure out the relative costs for a larger, twin-engine boat.

Of course, one of the great advantages of the quality, lighter weight, and new construction materials and design now used in game fishing equipment is that it allows smaller and lighter trailer boats to participate in equal opportunity game fishing these days. Rods and reels made with space-age stuff with incredible capabilities can be carried on a small boat and fished using stand-up harnesses, so until we start talking about marlin over 350kg or so, just about anything can be fought effectively from a small trailer boat.

So I'm going to base this information brief on a typical inboard diesel powered game boat of at least 8 metres, which I consider to be roughly small to middle ground in this business. You can basically upsize or downsize the numbers and the argument anywhere either side from a modestly-priced 5 metre (...and 5-figure ownership cost) alloy trailer boat, to a 65ft floating gin palace that will lighten your pocket by many millions of dollars just to drive out of the harbour for the first time.

Game boats are definitely an expensive pastime. There are obviously some professionals who make money out of owning a great top-of-the-line game boat, but there are only a handful of these individuals. So despite those lucky few having an idyllic lifestyle taking wealthy clientele out to catch magnificent fish in deep blue ocean - and be well paid for it - the majority of us punters foot all the bills and have little to show for it at the end of the day except, if we're lucky, a couple of orange tag cards to stick in the mail, a few great photos, and a great sense of success to ponder over the best tasting beer in the world – that first one after the mooring ropes go on and the motor stops.

So... let's buy a boat. New, and fully set up to game fish of course...? Be ready to drop \$300,000 on a small flybridge game boat, or about \$5 million plus on a big Salthouse, Viking, O'Brien and so forth.

Used, there are some older, but still nice 26ft Black Watch cruisers around for as little as \$65,000, but more likely \$125,000. And you can get a decent 35-40ft twin engine brand name flybridge cruiser for between \$150,000 to \$850,000 depending on how many hours on the motors you're comfortable with, and how much polished cabinetry, master suite goodies, and flybridge electronic gadgetry you want.

You need to note that the costing figures below take no account of the cost of ownership – if you're paying the bank for this privilege, that's a whole different story.

But back to the example of my boat...

Annual fixed costs:

Marina mooring fees	\$4,400
Registration	\$100
Annual haul out	\$1000
Anti-fouling and Propspeed	\$650
Hull anodes	\$65
Insurance	\$1200
Sub-total annual fixed costs	\$7515

Hourly direct costs:

Fuel – 12lt/hr average for a full day of fishing to the shelf and back @ \$1.65/lt -	\$20 per hour
Oil - 1lt per 10 hours replacement cycle @ \$4.00 per litre -	\$0.40 per hour
Filters – 1 x oil @\$60 every 100 hours -	\$0.60 per hour
2 x fuel @ \$35 ea every 100 hours -	\$0.35 per hour
1 x transmission @\$75 every 300 hours -	\$0.25 per hour
Engine anodes – 7 x \$15 every 200 hours -	\$0.50 per hour
Engine timing belt and labour – every 1000 hours -	\$1 per hour
Engine tune and adjustment – every 1000 hours -	\$0.60 per hour

Sub total	\$23.70 per hour
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So, say you fish moderately hard and run up 300 hours per year	\$7110 per year
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Plus... Other consumables (diesel additive, anti-freeze, alternator belts, rags, detergent, polish) say...	\$500 per year
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Plus... Unscheduled maintenance and component replacement (alternator, water pump rebuild and seals, wiring repairs, bilge pump replacements, hoses, clamps) say....	\$2000 per year
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So... at a nominal 300 hours per year, expenses are	Fixed	\$7515
	Hourly	\$7110
	Other	\$2500
Grand Total Annual direct cost of ownership	Total	\$17,125

Which at 300 hours per year, equates to \$57 per hour, subject primarily to fuel price fluctuation.

Also, self-maintenance and cleaning – not factored in, but say 1 man-hour per 4 engine hours – do the math on that if you had to pay for it! I do most maintenance myself except specialist work like engine tune-up and timing belt replacement, water pump repair and Propspeed application. No labour costs for self-maintenance are included here at all!

Depreciation... say 10% per annum over the first 5 years if kept outside? Also deliberately not factored in, but significant.

Even without considering the latter two factors, an indicative \$57 per operating hour for a smaller, single-engine game boat is no small cost to go fishing for 10 hours per day.

And because we're talking about game fishing, what about the...

Game fishing capital outlays including at least:

4 x Tiagra (or equivalent) 80W game reels at \$1000 each	\$4000
4 x Tiagra (or equivalent) 50W " " at \$800 each	\$3200
2 x " " 30W " " at \$500 each	\$2000
10 x factory game rods at \$600 each	\$2400
(... and you could double that for gorgeous custom game rods from <i>No Regrets</i>)	
Bait and light jigging rigs	\$800
Tag poles x 2 @ \$100 each	\$200
Assorted Gaffs x 3 @ \$100 each	\$300
Harnesses x 2 @ \$300 each	\$600
Teaser	\$100
Flag set	\$300
Modest lure collection of say 40 skirted lures	\$2800

That's an astonishing \$16,700 for a modest set of kit!

Add to that the following annual game fishing consumables of at least:

Re-spool of IGFA mono at least once per year x 10 reels	\$1000
25 x wind-on leaders at \$20 a pop, usually replaced after any fight	\$500
Re-skirting of top 10 hot lures after about 6 months in the water	\$250
Hooksets x 10	\$500
Trace mono	\$200
Crimps, heat-shrink, swivels, shackles, sleeves, dacron, etc	\$300
Rubber bands	\$30
Outrigger re-rigs	\$200
Annual servicing of one third of your rods and reels over a three-year cycle	\$500

And so that's another \$3480 or so just to keep your gear in top shape and eliminate the wear and tear that a few blue marlin can inflict on all that pretty stuff.

All of the above makes a few thousand for ritzy golf club membership, \$20 a round for a golf cart, and a \$3,000 set of high tech irons every couple of years look like pretty good value in the alternative sporting activity stakes!

Now the average game fishing skipper goes into this with eyes wide open, and is clearly prepared to put this money into his or her chosen sport so that all who step on the boat can enjoy sharing this great activity with a crew of enthusiasts, so all of this is a given.

However, spare a thought for the skipper, who if he's an amateur, probably has a wife or girlfriend who wonders where all the money goes, and who the mistress is who he's always with when she hears the old familiar "just got to duck down to do a bit of work on the boat, love..." He's also the guy who gets covered in muck and black anti-fouling when spending at least three days a year under the boat on the slipway, and oil and diesel while aggravating his arthritis bent double around an inaccessible engine doing a filter change or bilge clean up every month, or simply spends hours on end with a noisy orbital polisher, a vacuum doing the interior carpet, a shampooer doing the upholstery, a chamois on the clears, etc, etc, etc...

On the other hand, when that same skipper leaves the marina on a gorgeous morning with a brilliant blue sky lighting up overhead, a fantastic forecast, and a great crew on the deck of a spotlessly clean boat in top nick, it all seems like great fun again. And when that Blue Marlin crash-tackles a lure on the short corner then dances away on its tail for 500 yards without stopping for a second, it's worth every penny!

This is game fishing... warts, dollar bills, and all!