

Outboard Motor Comparisons, Reviews, and Brand Loyalty.

Does it really matter?



For many people the decision to purchase an outboard engine is based on brand loyalty or past experience with a particular brand. For others it is from what they have heard by word of mouth, forum talk, or some opinionated article they have read. The question posed is "does it really matter which brand you go with? Is there one brand better than the other?" The answer YES and NO.

First we will explain the "No" part: (Is there one brand better than the other?)

So you have heard bad things about Mercury and only good things about Johnson OMC? People have told you that Chrysler engines were junk and Yamaha motors are the only motors that hold up in saltwater? You are too scared to purchase a Tohatsu or Nissan because you are not familiar with the engine? All of these propositions are typical opinions and sentiments that individual boaters have preached. None of these are concrete facts that all boaters can agree on. Lets check out the most common scenarios related to brand loyalty that we at AFA Marine come across:

If you ask a dealer from each brand they will all tell you that their motors are the best and that everyone else's outboards are junk.

The reason is obvious, they probably want to make a sale for their brand.

If you ask someone who grew up using a particular brand and has had success with that brand they be partial to that motor and put down other makes.

Well how can they knock other brands if they have never tried them? It is no different then someone who has had success on a particular fishing lure only but has never tried the competitor's lure. They could have the same or better results without ever noticing it.

You have owned a particular brand and it blew up on you or you had problems. You then curse that brand because of your one experience.

Often this happens with poorly maintained used motors. You have to attribute most of the problems you will have to the usage or abuse that the previous owner(s) may have initiated.

You read an article from a brand that states their motor is far above any other brand

These are fundamental objectives marketers for these brands want to achieve. Funny thing is that some competing brands actually subcontract their motors to their competitors then battle it out in the advertising world.

You have only seen the particular boat you are buying have one brand installed on it.

This is most often a result of a particular dealer getting a better deal from the brand to equip these engines on their boat. Usually means that the particular brand will allow them to make bigger margins...more or less a business deal rather than brand reputation.

Your mechanic or boat repair shop usually has one particular brand in for repair more often than some others?

This is probably a result of their being more of that brand sold in that regional area than others. For example: here in Clearwater FL, there are more Yamaha and Mercury motors than Johnson or Evinrudes. Therefore odds are higher that you will see a Mercury or Yamaha being repaired in a shop.

In all honesty we don't really see any outboard motor brand has having serious flaws or should be shunned when making a purchasing decision. We often get phone calls from people who swear that they will never touch a Mercury(example) followed by a phone call from a client that will only trust Mercury. We get customers who are reluctant to purchase a Tohatsu thinking that they are a lower end motor when in actuality they are one of the best motors we have ever tested. Some people even go as far as to claim that they will never buy an Evinrude but will be happy to own a Johnson. We are often startled by this because the two motors are identical except for paint and decals*.

Lets Explain the "Yes" Part: (Is there one brand better than the other?)

Well for certain situations one brand actually is better than the other.....for you. This does not apply to everyone since not everyone has the same needs and applications for these motors. Some motors provide features and benefits better than others but in a comparison of all motors each have their subtle differentiation. In order to alleviate a homogenous market, brands have utilize a small degree of product differentiation. The functionality and mechanics of different brands all have one thing in common....performance.

Here are a few scenarios that we feel make sense to choose one brand over the other:

You want a motor that gives you the option of changing shaft length by adding or subtracting a component.

In this scenario you may consider a Johnson or Evinrude (others convert as well) outboard since the 4-15hp outboard motors have extension kits.

You have to have an outboard motor that has a gear shifter integrated into the tiller.

In this scenario you may consider a Mercury or Mariner outboard since they are the only brand that has the shifter built right into the twist tiller.

You want a sailboat motor that weighs under 60lbs but has the power of a 10hp.

In this scenario you may consider a Nissan or Tohatsu because they have one of the best sailboat 2-strokes the 9.8 hp

You are not concerned with weight and you want to have the most powerful motor for the horsepower rating

In this scenario you may consider a Suzuki since we have found them to be the most powerful motors for their rating. (Based on our tests. We make no statements claiming that Suzuki's will beat any other motor)

You want to find the right outboard for you by researching the features that each brand offers. It is foolish to exclude brands because of what you heard, you should do it based on concrete facts such as features.

Reputed "Off Brands"

This is probably the most important section of this article. THERE ARE VERY FEW IF ANY OFF BRAND OR GENERIC OUTBOARD MOTOR PRODUCERS IN THE USA TODAY. As of now there are only a handful of outboard motors that can be considered generic. Since the EPA has mandated emission regulations on outboard motors most of these companies have decided to get out of the motor business.

We do not regard Tohatsu, Nissan, Suzuki, Gamefisher, Mariner, Force or Chrysler as "off brands". Each of these brands have produced some of the best running outboard motors. Just because you do not see dealerships on every street corner does not mean that these motors are not quality products. In fact, we have found that Tohatsu/Nissan and Suzuki to have excellent engineering and innovative technology. We find that almost every used Nissan, Tohatsu, and Suzuki that we come across, regardless of appearance, have been strong runners. Many lodges and resorts world wide love these motors because of their durability and pricing. As far as Gamefisher, Chrysler and Force go these are great motors as well. They are economy motors that are targeted for a price conscious consumer. This does not mean that they have a shorter life span this basically means that they are less refined and may have less features(such as F-N-R clutch) than high priced motors. You should never disregard these motors as an purchase option just because of perceived notions.

Summary:

We at AFA Marine feel very confident that all manufacturers today and of years past have all been pretty consistent in putting out a great product. Outboard motors are some of the most sophisticated engineering that man has ever created. The thought and intuition that went into creating and designing outboard motors is very fascinating. In order to produce an engine that functions as a propulsion device for a water craft it must be able to handle the elements. Almost all engines that were created have been able to handle the test of time, stress, usage, and abuse. With this in regard there are a few brands that decided to take an economical marketing approach which meant using cheaper materials. For the most part, you can count on almost any brand or outboard motor to function well if taken care of.

