

## Certified trailers are the best ones to buy

BY ADOLFO MENDEZ

A retailer of pontoon trailers tells visitors to its Web site: "If you don't know much about trailers, these four letters are all you need to know." The letters are N-M-M-A, short for the National Marine Manufacturers Association.

It's a simple way the retailer has found to begin talking about certification—or, to be more precise, promote the fact that its trailers have been officially certified by the Chicago-based trade association. The site goes on to briefly describe what NMMA certification entails and how certification benefits consumers. At a time when more and more boat and motor dealers are choosing to become industry certified themselves, they're also seeing a growing movement to certify another segment of the recreational boating industry: trailer manufacturers.

One person who is intimately involved with trailer certification at NMMA is Robert Newsome, NMMA's manager of engineering standards. Newsome oversees the trailer certification program, which he says is being undertaken primarily for safety reasons. "Certification is about making sure that the consumer gets the safest trailer possible, and NMMA certification has helped consumers, boat dealers or boat and trailer dealers take the guess work out of that. When they're purchasing an NMMA-certified trailer, they know right out of the box that someone's gone in there to make sure that all the standards are met, all the regulations are met. It's safe to buy."

Toward that goal, the NMMA along with the Trailer Manufacturers Association (TMA) recently approved a measure that requires all NMMA-member boat trailer manufacturers be certified by the 2009 model year. Newsome expects that there will be about 50 trailer manufacturers certified within the next two years. Currently, there are 29 companies that have been certified.

To determine if this a high or low number of trailer manufacturers is difficult,



Robert Newsome, NMMA's manager of engineering standards.

Newsome noted, because the total number of trailer manufacturers in the country is hard to verify. That's partly due to the fact that some of them are small factories that might produce only 10 trailers a year, or perhaps sell only custom-made trailers. "It's really hard to accurately say how many [trailer manufacturers] are out there," he said.

Although NMMA is not entirely sure what percentage of trailer manufacturers in the nation are certified, they would like to see 100% of their members certified. To get there, though, the industry has to overcome two common misperceptions. Among boat and motor dealers, the perception is that trailer certification is unnecessary. Among trailer manufacturers themselves, the perception is that certification is too expensive to pursue.

Addressing the latter issue, Newsome said, "A lot of dealers and manufacturers think this is an expensive program, that this is going to change the cost of their trailers or change their profits, that it's not cost effective. That's the most common misperception." The truth is far different. "This is not done [by the NMMA] to make money. It is done solely to help manufacturers give consumers a better product."

Newsome said the cost to become certified is, on average, \$1,500. "So if you

think about a company the builds 5,000 trailers a year, that's a negligible cost per trailer—less than the cost of a light bulb," Newsome says.

Most of the fee is used to cover the inspection process, which Newsome said is not a time-consuming process. "We have inspectors all throughout the country, so we can get out to the manufacturing facility really quickly," Newsome said.

### The process

So what's involved in getting a trailer manufacturer to be "certified?" The certification process begins when a trailer manufacturer submits an application to NMMA with basic information about the various models it produces. This information includes such things as the gross vehicle weight rating, as well as the length and width of the trailers.

Once the NMMA has a list of all the trailer models, it arranges an inspection of the manufacturing operation and the trailers. The NMMA hires a third-party inspector, that is, someone who is not an NMMA employee, but who has been trained by NMMA to perform certification inspections. "We want the program to be as impartial as possible," Newsome said.

Once at the manufacturing facility, the inspectors look over all of the models to make sure they comply with the Code of Federal Regulations for trailers issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the Society of Automotive Engineer (SAE) standards.

### About the standards

The NMMA does not write the standards. It simply enforces established industry standards and federal regulation. "We're involved with SAE in the writing and reviewing of these standards, but we're just one party of many that actually write these standards," he said. "We're looking at things like the electrical system, so we're going to take into account any voltage drops with the electricity depending on the size of the conductor and the distance it's traveling," Newsome said.

In all, trailers are certified in the areas of identification plates, capacity ratings, couplings, safety chains, lighting, winches, brakes, registration proce-



dures, and conspicuity systems.

For example, trailer lighting is critical during nighttime driving, so NMMA inspects to make sure this aspect of the trailer is up to code. "Are the trailers using the right type of conductor? Are the wires themselves properly insulated? Are they properly installed? You want to guarantee that you're not losing electrical currents when it's traveling however many feet based on the wire size so you actually get the correct output at the light. It's a lot more than where a light is placed or the illuminicity of the light itself or the color of the light itself. Is there the proper amount of electricity reaching that light so it's going to function properly?" Newsome added.

The specifications are precise. "If a trailer is under or over 80-inches wide, there's two different requirements for where a light needs to be—how many degrees it is facing up and down and forward and backward," Newsome said.

A good lighting system design should be based on the shape of the vehicle's length and width to make sure that a car and trailer combination at night is not going to 'disappear' to another driver on the road.

### Finding problems

Inspections that uncover areas where the trailer manufacturers are doing things in variance with the standards or regulations are recorded and passed on to the NMMA. "There are trailers we've seen that have not had a single variance, and we have also found trailers that have had variances. There's really no common area where we find the most variance. It's different for each one," Newsome said.

The NMMA examines the inspector's report, signs off on it, and then sends it to the manufacturer. If there are noted variances, the manufacturer has 30 days to respond, showing how each of those variances was corrected. The manufacturer will submit drawings, documents, whatever it needs to accurately exemplify that it now meets all the standards and regulations. "Once that's done, we do a complete review here in the office," Newsome said. "We make sure that the way they corrected did not create a different or new variance—so there's a lot of checks and balances—and once that's completed, they're certified for that



This 2-inch round sticker is used to identify a certified trailer.

model year." The manufacturers must certify all models as fitted with all factory-supplied equipment on a model year basis.

It can take a trailer manufacturer anywhere from a week to 40 days to become certified, according to Newsome. "It all really depends on how quickly they can make and implement the changes to become compliant. From start to finish—from the time they submit the application to the time when they have their inspection—most of them do it really quickly. Once you've been through the program once, you get the hang of it. You don't have as many variances and there are only things that can be changed very, very quickly," he said.

### Promotional efforts

The NMMA does have some outreach to boat and motor dealers about its certification program for trailers. Presentations are given, for example, at retailer association meetings, where dealers learn what certification is and what it means. For example, dealers are told that if a boat manufacturer wants to package a trailer with a certified boat, it has to be an NMMA-certified trailer. However, the certified boat/trailer package only applies if it's coming directly from a manufacturer. In addition, the NMMA has an education campaign underway to help inform both consumers and dealers about the benefits of certification—at boat shows, with flyers, signage and online.

"From time-to-time we have magazine advertisements about the benefits of certified trailers," Newsome added. Moreover, information about the benefits of certified trailers is presented on [www.NMMA.org](http://www.NMMA.org) for the trade side and [www.Discoverboating.com](http://www.Discoverboating.com) on the consumer side. "Essentially, we're helping

to support you, to support the quality of trailer you build, so hopefully that means more sales. If consumers are going to demand a quality product, and we can take the guess work out of that and help improve the purchasing experience for them, then they will seek an NMMA-certified product."

The NMMA believes its certification program is an example of the industry being proactive to make one segment of the marine industry as strong as possible. "We've always found a way to help every trailer manufacturer we've always worked with," Newsome said. "For a trailer manufacturer, certification is about risk management. It is a way for them to have an outside party come in and look at their operations. If they ever ran into a situation where they had to prove the fact that they were incorporating federal regulations into their manufacturing standards, they'll have proof. We can stand up and say, 'We know for a fact because we've worked with them and we verify that they're building to these standards.'" ↴

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Kady-Krogen Yachts celebrates 30th anniversary this year

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Kady-Krogen Yachts, a Stuart, Fla.-based manufacturer of trawler yachts.

The late naval architect James S. Krogen and Art Kadey founded the company in 1977 to build the venerable Krogen 42 footer. This yacht featured a tri-level interior plus displacement-to-length ratios that made both long distance and coastal cruising a joy.

"During 2007, we aim to showcase our legacy of capability, liveability, family, and value, and to further our mission of building the finest full displacement production trawler yachts in the world," said John Gear, Kady-Krogen president.

Anniversary celebrations will take place throughout the year at trawler festivals and boat shows, with a grand bash being held at the Krogen Cruisers Rendezvous, October 4-7, 2007, at the Calvert Marina in Solomons, Md.