Used Laser Buying Guide

When buying or selling a used Laser, there are many things to consider. The value of a Laser is obviously what someone is willing to pay for it, but there are a couple of key areas to check that will have buyer and seller on the same page.

1) Deck & Hull Stiffness

This is the most critical aspect of buying a used Laser, and it's a little hard to judge, but it's important to judge well. The stiffness of a Laser’s deck & hull are similar to a car’s odometer. Start here for a general understanding of the boat’s condition.

A boat can lie somewhere between ‘stiff like new’ or ‘soft like a couch’. A brand new boat is very stiff, but this stiffness decreases with general use and having water inside the boat over time. A stiff boat is one that resists your best efforts pushing on the deck and hull with your hands. A relatively soft boat will have obvious flex and give when similarly stressed.

To check, push down on either side of cockpit. Push firmly, your body weight will rest here while sailing, so don't be shy. Does the deck flex when you push it? Yes, no, maybe so? Maybe a lot, or maybe it’s nice and firm? Test the cockpit floor and around the mast step.

Depending on what you felt, you have just gauged the relative integrity of the hull. You have some idea of the stiffness and current integrity. If the boat was stiff and didn't deflect much, you are likely looking at a good hull. If the boat is softer or 'mushy' to touch, then the boat is far down the list unless the price is great. From here on out is a personal value decision about what you need from the boat and the other items down the list.

It’s not 100%, but generally a softer boat has some leak points as well. There are many articles online on how to search out these leaks, but you’ll never get back the original stiffness in the boat. A stiff boat usually is a dry boat, which are critical combinations for racing.

As we move on to the next parts, know that you simply may not require a stiff hull. Knowing what a softer boat means in terms of general condition can help you make an educated decision about what boat is right for you. Be careful not to let that take you too far down the scale however. A stiff boat obviously being worth more will also continue to hold its value better than a boat that is becoming softer and softer.

Deck and Hull stiffness is important, but it’s just the one part of the value.
2) Mast Step

I place a lot of importance on this area, more so than I think a lot of other people do. It’s expensive and rather difficult to fix and it’s easy to check, so get it right before you buy.

Look for spider cracks around the deck opening to the step. If you can, fill the step with water and check it in 5 minutes. If it is still full of water, great! If some water has drained out... well, now it's inside your boat causing other problems, and that's not a good thing! If you see an inspection port right next to the step (big 4”-5” disc that can be opened to gain access to the inside of the boat) the step has probably been repaired or replaced already.

Boats 10 years old or newer are generally ok in this area, but check it out carefully on older boats. You don't want it to break on you while sailing!

3) Kit (SAIL, SPARS, BLADES & UPGRADES)

These days lots of people have practice sails for sailing around, but even with that a good SAIL is very important, racing or otherwise. You might not need a race sail, but a tired, stretched and worn sail will just steepen your Laser learning curve. Because the material in all Laser sails is fairly low tech, it stretches and looses its shape over a period of use. An old sail is less efficient, harder to de-power (flatten out) and harder to trim into proper shape. Even if you aren’t intending to go as fast as possible, you don’t want a car designed for a V-8 engine running on only five cylinders! Make sure you get a boat with a good sail. It should have some crispness to it and not be discolored. A soft to the touch sail with yellowing is not an asset to the boat.

There are three SPARS on a Laser; the top section, bottom section and boom. The spars are made of aluminum and are designed to be flexible, but even so, they can bend with use. You want them nice and straight. Sight down the length as you would a 2 x 4 of lumber. If the boat has been in salt water, check the rivets on the spars that hold the plastic and metal fittings in place. Corrosion is pretty easy to see, but it’s hard to accurately tell how much damage has occurred below the surface without drilling out. Check for straightness and inspect all rivets.

Warped, rough or chipped BLADES are slow. Very old boats had wooden blades, modern boats have a 'foam' type blade, and new boats (2011 onward) have fiberglass blades. The daggerboard can easily warp or chip at the edges if not treated with basic care. Sight the trailing edge for large variations from straight. The rudder can have stress at the head where the rudder head bolts through. That said, rough blades aren’t difficult to make smooth out, little nicks and gouges can often be wet sanded out with 600/800/1200 grit sandpaper. Big nicks or gouges will require gelcoat repairs. Straight blades without big gouges are good. Curved or bent blades are not!

The Laser now has some UPGRADED controls, the boom vang, sail outhaul and sail cunningham. This started in 2001, new boats come these the new items, and many boats have been retrofitted by now. These new controls simply make it easier to control and fine-tune the Laser. The boat doesn’t go any faster with them, but it’s simpler and more intuitive. You can
also de-power the boat more easily, which is pretty important. Boats with the upgrades are pretty common, but make sure you get one with the 15:1 vang, 6 or 10:1 cunningham and 4 or 6:1 outhaul with the deck cleats. Not worth getting a boat without these anymore unless you are just going for a very low end / lake boat.

4) General Appearance

Over its lifetime, a Laser will acquire scratches, nicks and dings primarily in the gelcoat layer, which effectively makes up the entire outside of the boat. As long as the fiberglass below the gelcoat isn’t exposed or damaged (it has a different texture and is a millimeter or two under the gelcoat, it is easily distinguished) don’t worry about cosmetics.

Gel coat scratches and markings can be wet-sanded out with 600-800-1200 grit sandpaper in a few minutes with haste or an afternoon if you want to make the boat shine. Sealing up small gelcoat chips is easy as pie as well. Your local dealer can match the color, but if you look at the Lasers around, any color will do for most small repairs 😊 While a nicely sanded and fair look is easy on the eyes, it really doesn’t affect the value much at all.

You do want to watch for fiberglass damage. Discoloration, or fading is a sign of UV damage though. The Laser stands up to UV rays pretty well, but a long time in the sun will eventually damage the appearance, and the materials that make up the hull and deck.

5) Extras

Extra parts that make it easy for someone to buy a boat and get right to sailing are valuable, and most people under appreciate what they add to a package. A launching dolly, boat cover, gear bag, spar bag and all that add big value to a used boat? Racers will want carbon tillers and extension. Most boats don't include these, but it's a bonus if they do. Then you have wind indicators, a compass perhaps, maybe nice hi-tech lines... those all add value to the the right sailor!

Finally never forget the value of the Laser itself. There are fleets of Lasers everywhere. Lots of sailors who race their boats are willing to teach. There are accessories and extras to make sailing fast, fun, exciting, safe and easy.

While it’s impossible and probably not necessary to put a monetary component on the fact that the Laser is a ton of fun, it’s another piece of the puzzle of getting into the best and one of the most popular single person small sailboat in the Northwest.
Notes:
Originally compiled as notes, then in short form for a sailor on the Seattle Laser Fleet list serve. Here in long-winded form to include more detail than is probably necessary. West Coast Sailing also provides a much more concise brochure courtesy of the shop.

West Coast Sailing
433 N. Thompson
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(503) 285-5536
www.WestCoastSailing.com
In order to help you evaluate the boats more accurately we have devised a 4 star system for the 4 critical areas of the Laser: Hull/Deck, Sail, Spars, and Blades.

**Deck and Hull**

* Mast step repaired; noticeable damage; major gelcoat/fiberglass work; very soft hull/deck
** Softer hull and deck. Minor gelcoat or fiberglass work. Cosmetic damage
*** Light scratches/dings in gelcoat. Solid mast step. Stiff deck and hull, good race condition
**** Like new condition. Only minor scratches to gelcoat.

**Sail(s)**

* 5+ years. Soft and very stretched out. Only good for recreational use
** 2-4 years old. Softer and noticeable stretched. Practice sail condition
*** 1-2 years old. Good shape, general race condition
**** <1 year old. Crisp, excellent shape, top race condition

**Spars**

* Major corrosion, bends, dents or loose fittings. Recreational condition only.
** Minor bends, wear or corrosion. Noticeable to race performance
*** Small wear and tear, mostly cosmetic. Negligible to race performance
**** Like new condition. Only minor cosmetic scratches

**Blades**

* Broken tips, large bends or gouges, significant repair
** Smaller chips and scratches. Minor warping an
*** Light use, minor chips or scratches mostly cosmetic No warps or bends
**** Like new, top race condition.