

20' Bennington Pontoon

Basic Operation & Safety Manual

Engine: 60 HP Mercury 4-Stroke Outboard (Electric Start + Power Trim)

1. General Information

Boat Model: Bennington 20' Pontoon (twin-tube recreational pontoon)

Engine Model: Mercury 60 HP EFI 4-Stroke

Fuel Capacity: 20–24 gallons (varies by configuration)

Battery: 12 V Marine starting battery

Recommended Fuel: Regular unleaded gasoline (91 octane minimum)

Engine Oil: SAE 10W-30 (NMMA FC-W-certified marine oil)

Maximum Capacity: Typically 8–10 persons or 1,500–1,700 lbs (check capacity plate)



2. Pre-Operation Checklist (Before Launch)

Boat & Safety

- Drain plug installed (if applicable)
- Life jackets for all passengers + throwable flotation device
- Fire extinguisher, horn/whistle, anchor, dock lines onboard
- Navigation lights working
- Battery charged and terminals tight
- Fuel level checked and vent open
- Seats, gates, and fence panels secure
- Pontoon logs inspected for dents, leaks, or loose fittings

Engine & Controls

- Engine oil at proper level
- Propeller clean and secure
- Fuel line connected, primer bulb firm
- Gear selector in **neutral**
- Kill-switch lanyard clipped to operator's wrist or life vest

-  Steering wheel moves smoothly
 -  Power trim and tilt switch working properly
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3. Starting Procedure

1. Trim engine **fully down** (lower into water).
2. Attach **kill-switch lanyard**.
3. Ensure **gearshift in neutral**.
4. Prime fuel system (squeeze primer bulb until firm).
5. Turn **ignition key to ON**; wait for gauges to cycle.
6. Turn key to **START** until engine fires, then release.
7. Verify **steady water stream** (cooling “pee hole”).
8. Let engine idle for **2–3 minutes** to warm up.

 **No water stream = Shut off engine immediately!**
Check water intake for debris or obstruction.

4. Operating the Pontoon

Shifting & Throttle

- Push control lever forward for **Forward**, pull back for **Reverse**.
- Always shift at **idle speed** — never at high RPM.
- Increase throttle smoothly to desired cruising speed.

Trim Adjustment

- Use **power-trim switch** on the throttle control:
 - **Trim Down** → better acceleration, stability in choppy water.
 - **Trim Up** → better speed & fuel efficiency once planing.
- Adjust trim while underway until boat rides level and smooth.

Cruising Tips

- Balance passengers evenly front-to-back and side-to-side.
- Avoid sharp turns at high speeds.
- Reduce throttle before crossing wakes or waves.
- Watch depth — pontoons draft about 1 ft but lower units extend deeper.
- Keep speed moderate; best economy is around $\frac{3}{4}$ **throttle**.

5. Stopping, Anchoring & Docking

1. Bring throttle to **idle**.
2. Shift into **neutral** and let engine idle 30–60 seconds to cool.
3. Trim engine **partially up** when approaching shallow water or trailer.
4. Turn key to **OFF** and remove **kill-switch lanyard**.
5. Turn off battery switch (if equipped).
6. Secure dock lines and deploy fenders.

6. After-Use / Trailering

- Drain any water from deck and compartments.
- Rinse engine and pontoons with fresh water.
- Disconnect fuel line (if portable tank) or close vent.
- Check propeller and skeg for damage.
- Trim motor **down** for trailering.
- Use **motor support bracket** during transport.
- Cover boat or store under shelter.

7. Routine Maintenance Schedule (General)

Interval	Maintenance Item
Before each use	Check oil, fuel, battery, prop, safety gear
Every 20–25 hrs / Monthly	Inspect spark plugs, fuel filter, wiring
Every 50 hrs / Season	Change engine oil & filter; check gear oil
Every 100 hrs / Yearly	Replace spark plugs, inspect impeller, change lower unit oil
End of season	Stabilize fuel, fog cylinders, remove & charge battery

8. Winterizing & Storage

1. Add fuel stabilizer and run engine 5 min to circulate.
2. Change engine and gearcase oil.
3. Fog cylinders (via air intake) while running.
4. Remove propeller and grease shaft.
5. Disconnect battery and store indoors.
6. Drain water from pontoons (if any moisture inside).

- Clean deck and upholstery, then cover securely.
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9. Troubleshooting Quick Guide

Symptom	Likely Cause	Suggested Fix
Engine won't start	Kill-switch off, battery weak, fuel disconnected	Check kill-switch, charge battery, reconnect fuel
No water from tell-tale	Blocked intake or bad impeller	Stop engine, clear blockage, service impeller
Engine stalls at idle	Dirty plugs, old fuel, low idle speed	Replace plugs, drain and refill fuel
Trim not working	Low voltage or blown fuse	Recharge battery, check fuse
Poor performance	Wrong trim, heavy load, fouled prop	Adjust trim, rebalance load, clean prop

10. Safety Reminders

- Always wear a **life jacket** and **attach kill-switch lanyard**.
 - Keep all passengers **inside the fence** while underway.
 - Observe posted **no-wake zones** and **local boating laws**.
 - Never exceed capacity or horsepower limits.
 - Do not run engine out of water.
 - Keep at least 3 ft clearance under prop when trimming up in shallow areas.
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11. Reference Resources

- **Bennington Pontoon Boats:** <https://www.benningtonmarine.com/>
- **Mercury Marine Owner's Manuals:** <https://www.mercurymarine.com/owners>
- **Boating Safety Course (Free):** <https://www.boatus.org/free/>