

# POWERBOAT REPORTS

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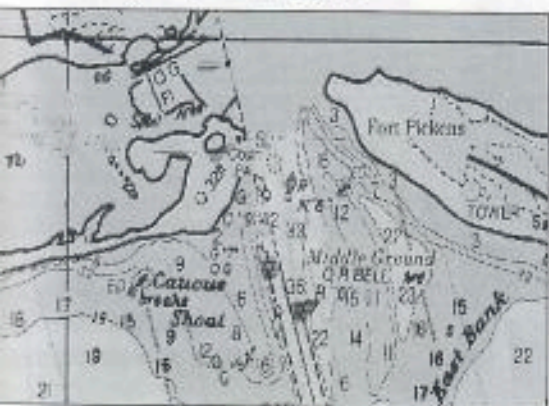


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# Survey Report: Mainship Owners Still Mainly Satisfied

*While many owners of older Mainships lamented the company's switch from traditional-looking semi-displacement trawlers to ultra-modern express cruisers, the owners of the newer boats are generally more satisfied.*

Despite the company's traditional-sounding name, Mainship has produced one of the most changeable of cruising powerboat lines in recent years. In February 1992, when we last reported on a reader survey of Mainship owners, there were two distinct types—the semi-displacement Nantucket trawler series built from 1978 to about 1988 or so, followed by a line of European-styled cruisers that represented an attempt to grab part of the flash and speed market. Other than company name, owners of the trawlers and the newer Mediterranean models shared little.

James "Chip" Shea, marketing director for Luhrs Marine Group, explained the design change: "Trawlers

started to die off in 1988 or 89, because the cost of fuel became cheaper and people wanted to go faster." Shea says that the Mediterranean sold well, but in the last three years, Mainship has reversed direction somewhat, creating a new line of sedan bridge and aft-cabin cruisers that offer a blend of traditional and contemporary styling, with toned-down interiors, improved ergonomics and performance.

But there's even better news for fans of the old-style Mainships. While expanding and improving the new generation—dealers say the 1995 37 Motor Yacht has been selling briskly—Mainship has decided to return to its roots with an updated version of the venerable trawler that should debut by the first of next year. According to Shea, the "graying" of the boating customer base is resulting in older and less agile boaters, including converted sailors. Luhrs is predicting these older boaters will be in the market for "no-nonsense, low-maintenance" powerboats, with lots of room

and improved planing performance of close to 20 knots or so.

Despite the seeming aberration of the Mediterranean models (which, incidentally, scored highest in overall satisfaction in our current poll), Mainships have always appealed to a certain segment of the market—cruisers looking for sensible, clean-looking boats that deliver what they promise. Mainships are never the best and brightest boats at any dock, but they offer good value for the selling price and the result, as both our Mainship polls showed, is a generally well-satisfied group of owners. Overall, our 1995 readers agreed with their 92 counterparts in giving their boats a solid "B" for satisfaction. As the Florida owner of the popular 40-foot Nantucket expressed it, the boats are "good looking, cheap, and seakindly."

## The Boats/The Builder

Like many boatbuilders, Mainship started up shortly after World War II, when Henry Luhrs of New Jersey be-



**Right:** The 35-foot Mainship II differs somewhat from the earlier version shown on the cover of this issue. Either version, or the newer Mainship III, can be a good deal on the used-boat market.

gan producing a lapstrake-hulled Jersey sea skiff. "It was a great deal," remembers George Hawkins, the New England boat show promoter who would later become an early Mainship dealer. For about \$3,900, Luhrs gave you a 26-foot cuddy powered with a Chrysler engine. Luhrs sold off the line in the mid-60s but, in 1970, sons John and Warren acquired Silverton and began building fiberglass boats at a factory in Tom's River, New Jersey. Hawkins recalls the operation as a model of efficiency and a forerunner of "on-time" inventory so much touted by the Japanese, with components arriving just as they were needed on the assembly line. Again, the early Silverton was a good deal—\$9,800 for a 27-footer.

Mainship came into being when the Luhrs family bought some trawler molds from a builder in Maine, from which the company name was derived. The molds were the start of a 10-year series of trawlers, a Down East-type boat that echoed the design of the early Jersey skiffs. With a sharp entry, broad transom, and a single

Perkins diesel, the trawlers did an honest 10 knots with reasonable fuel economy. They were reportedly quite seakindly, except in a following sea where it took some dexterity on the throttle to keep the craft on track. In all, more than 1,000 of the trawlers were built and, from reader reports, most seem to be still cruising today.

For some time, Mainships, including the Mediterranean series, had been built at a plant in Marlborough, New Jersey, but toward the end of 1991, Mainship production was moved south to St. Augustine, Florida, where Luhrs Inc. sportfishermen are made.

Mainship hulls are hand laid of solid glass and cored with end-grain balsa in the deck moldings. On models where bridges are separate from the hull, they are screwed, bolted, and sealed with 3M 5200 or similar adhesive. Hull-to-deck joints are screwed and sealed, then topped with a caprail that also is screwed on. Stanchions and cleats are through-bolted and cleats are back-plated as well. Mainships come with a five-year limited hull and structural warranty; despite a good reputation for blister resistance, however, they do not have a blister warranty.

Like all Luhrs products, Mainships come with a gear package that includes such things as life jackets and other safety equipment to meet Coast Guard requirements.

### The Survey Tells Us...

Our survey included Mainship 1994 back to the original model of 1978. Because of the strong correlation between Mainship model and overall scoring, the Nantucket series (within which there are variations), the Mediterranean series, the newest sedan bridge and aft models, which we grouped under the heading of Motor Yachts. Collectively, Mainship owners gave their boats a respectable 85-percent approval rating, and a strong 92.5-percent retention of their overall value. This compares to an 87-percent approval by Carver owners (PBR, March 1995), which might be considered the owner's closest competition.

As noted, the owners of Mediterranean series, who accounted for 18 percent of our responses, were most satisfied with their boats, awarding their boats a 92.5-percent approval for both overall satisfaction and value. Nantucket series, who represented 54 percent of reader responses, gave their boats the highest overall marks for value (92.5 percent), along with an 88-percent satisfaction rating. Owners of the newest models, 28 percent of respondents, posted the lowest satisfaction rating (just 77.5 percent), but gave their boats a 90-percent nod for value.

Many of the readers who responded were long-time owners (Mainship owners tend to stick with their boats while others had owned a variety of other makes, including more expensive brands. And while only 77.5 percent said they would definitely buy another Mainship (just 63 percent of Nantucket owners responded positively), this does not reflect general dissatisfaction with the boat company, we think, but rather happiness about the design direction taken in recent years, which seems to cut across the grain of the average customer's conservative views.

In all, Mainship owners seem a lot like their Carver counterparts, suffering few of the niggling complaints of persistent leaks, peeling veneer, or engine problems—that seem to plague other makes. We got a sense that

*Below: Owners gave the Mainship Mediterranean series—this is the 35-foot model—exceptionally high marks in all categories except low-speed handling, and 86 percent say they would buy again.*



# Satisfaction Survey Results: Mainship Owners

	Aesthetics/		Interior Layout	Sleeping Accomm.	Galley/ Head	Low- Speed Handling	High- Speed Handling	Engine/ Mech. Systems	Helm Ergo- nomics	Overall Value	Overall Satis- faction Average	Would Buy Again?	
	Fit & Finish	Cockpit/ Deck											
<b>By Model</b>													
Nantucket	2.8	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.5	2.8	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.8	3.5	3.3	63%
Motor Yacht	3.1	3.8	3.8	3.1	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.1	3.4	77%
Mediterranean	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.3	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.6	3.6	86%
<b>By Year</b>													
1981-84	3.3	3.2	2.8	2.9	3.6	2.7	3.4	3.1	3.1	3.8	3.3	3.2	78%
1985-87	3.1	3.3	3.7	3.1	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.4	3.4	4.0	3.6	3.4	75%
1988-91	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.4	3.2	3.6	3.6	3.6	80%
1992-94	2.9	3.9	3.8	3.2	3.8	3.6	3.5	3.0	3.1	3.5	3.0	3.4	80%
<b>All Surveys (by year)</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>78%</b>

Note: Survey responses are based on a 4.0 scale, with 0 = poor, 4 = excellent.

Mainship owners find something they don't like or that doesn't work, they fix it and get back to boating.

## Owners Tell Us...

As with our survey three years ago, owners were least happy with the general fit and finish, which along with sleeping accommodations got a approval rating of just 3.2, or 80 percent. This represented an improvement over the 92 poll, where readers gave fit and finish a 73-percent rate of approval. This change is primarily due to the enthusiasm of Mediterranean owners who, agree with them or not, simply like the style of their boats. Very few reported serious problems, such as deck delamination and gelcoat cracking, but one reader apparently had gotten the proverbial lemon (also badly prepped by the local dealer), which was not only coming apart at the seams, but also suffered from various mechanical problems and had gone through two transmissions inside of 80 hours of running.

Most owners acknowledge the fact that they had not paid for a luxury yacht with lots of trim and styling. Owners of the Nantucket series seemed willing to accept their boat's plain-jane appearance, offset more than a little by the traditional eye-catching lines. Many complaints were about substandard materials and bits of gear that production builders often sneak in to keep costs down. A Connecticut owner says he upgraded most

of "the junk" on his 1981 pilothouse: "I replaced everything rubber, most everything plastic." Several owners mentioned the flimsy head and water hoses installed on some models, an annoying if not serious shortcut. More serious were the gate valves. The same Connecticut owner replace the gate valves with seacocks and replaced the non-marine wiring he found in his electrical system. One surveyor told us of a Mediterranean 40 in the Chesapeake Bay area, in which combined problems with plumbing (flimsy hose, 90-degree bends) and wiring (the battery switch also turned off the bilge pump) sank the boat. Another puzzling omission on some boats in both the Nantucket and Mediterranean series was a strainer on raw-water engine intakes, an oversight most owners quickly rectify. In general, most Mainship owners are pleased with their boats, if not the high-level of workmanship. "Love the aesthetics—fit and finish is poor," summed up the owner of a 1985 Nantucket.

Features that do please a majority of Mainship owners are the cockpit/deck arrangements and the interior layout, both of which received 90-percent approval ratings. Instead of the usual ladder, bridges are easily accessed via molded-in steps. Owners of the newest models especially like the walkthrough from bridge to foredeck. A Boca Raton, Florida, owner who bought a 1994 Sedan Bridge, wrote: "The time the engineering de-

partment put into the bridge area sure paid off, because that's what sold my family on this boat." The owner of a 1993 40, who lives aboard each summer on Lake Superior, felt much the same way: "I was looking for a boat where I could access the foredeck via the flybridge. This was the only one that had the feature, and two years later I'm still happy about it." While not as convenient, the 11-inch-wide sidedecks on the older trawlers provide comfortable and secure passage forward. The main drawback is the narrow stairway leading up to the aft deck, passable but difficult, especially if carrying a load.

If some customers are sold because of the cockpit and deck, others are taken by Mainship's roomy and well-ordered interiors. Aft-cabin trawlers offer a roomy saloon, with galley and settee down a level. A former owner of a Pacemaker 38 said his Nantucket 36 offered much more livable space. And the owner of a 1982 30-foot trawler, who added a settee, extra storage drawers, and a Dickson oil-fired heating stove, said his boat "serves us well for fishing, hunting, and exploring Southeast Alaska." While the mid-sized trawlers seemed to maximize efficient use of space, the new Sedan Bridges got excellent reviews (and a 95-percent approval rating) for their interiors. "My wife chose this over four others in this size category," says the Illinois owner of a 1994 31-footer. "Galley is very light and airy and out

of the traffic flow," wrote the owner of a Sedan Bridge 40.

Sleeping accommodations drew a mix of praise and criticism. One family praised the generous berths on their 31-footer, while a Sedan Bridge 40 owner called the sleeping arrangements "generally excellent," except for the foldout guest sofa—a complaint echoed by owners of older trawlers as well.

Most owners seemed reasonably content with their Mainship's cruising performance, though less so with docking. Particularly unhappy were trawler owners who insisted on trying to get their semi-displacement boats up on plane. One, who said he could "only get 3,000 rpm wide open for about 18-19 knots," has changed props three times on his twin Crusader 270s in the quest for higher revs and more speed. The proud owner of a 1979 trawler that had been repowered with a Cummins 250 diesel (replacing the original Perkins 160) reported: "This 'trawler' now planes out at 12 knots, cruises at 14-15 knots and tops out at 17-18 knots." Yet another 1979 owner complained that he needed at least 18 feet of water below his keel to struggle up on plane at full throttle.

Happier were those who simply ease their Nantuckets along. "I never push it," said the owner of a 1986 aft-cabin model, who cruises along at 12 knots. This skipper reported burning

an average of 15 gallons an hour with his twin 270-hp Crusaders. Happier still are the owners of the Mediterranean express cruisers, modified V-hulls, that pack enough power to quickly get on plane and cruise at significantly higher speeds.

Docking maneuvers, especially with single-screw models, are another matter. "I would like to see a bigger keel," said the owner of a twin-engine Nantucket 36, which sports a 36-inch-deep keel (27 inches on some years). "You're at the mercy of the wind and current as soon as you go into neutral," added a crew member. Several owners bemoaned that the flat bottom aft, where the keel does not extend, makes maneuvering difficult. "I can turn it on a dime, but not make it go sideways!" said a frustrated Florida owner. Again, owners of the newer twin-engined hulls fared better. "I was concerned about docking because of the increased length," said one, who'd moved up to a Sedan Bridge 31 from a 25-foot walkaround. "In less than a week, this boat made me a docking pro."

Depending on year and model, access to engines and other mechanical systems was either easy or difficult. A Nantucket 36, for example, has as many as nine separate hatches in the main saloon alone. Owners indicated they would prefer fewer, larger hatches that could be raised and fastened. Mainship sends out

customer questionnaires—after delivery, then nine months later—and one request the company and responded to, was a dashboard for easier access to the 40-footers for easier access to many powerboats, some of which are difficult to reach. The 1985 Aft Cabin 36, for example, he had trouble accessing the pumps, while the owner of a Sedan Bridge 40 found the port stuffing box "close to accessibility" via the opening in the seat. "Apparently the dealer who did the original engine work also found the procedure quite difficult, because they couldn't accomplish the job." This and others we heard from, used to enhance access.

#### Our Inspection Shows...

For a modestly-priced cruiser, Mainship makes an excellent first impression, holding its own in terms of even when berthed alongside of Hatteras and Viking. Minor and small annoyances require a closer look. Despite relatively low rating for fit and finish, Mainships we looked at—service for longer than 100 hours—looked surprisingly neat and clean. There was minor weeping at the chion bases on a few models, nearly as noticeable as on other boats. Nearly as expensive, materials are made by Mainship.

## Market Scan: Used Mainship Boats

Model	Type	LOA	Yrs. Made	Engines	1988 New Boat Price	1994 Market High	1994 Market Low
34 Mainship III	Semi-Displ. Cruiser	34' 0"	1983-90	200 Diesel	\$90,700	\$59,300	\$43,300
35 Convertible	Semi-Displ. Cruiser	34' 11"	1992-93	2-320 Gas	—	—	—
36 Express	Express Cruiser	36' 5"	1992-93	2-320 Gas	—	—	—
36 Double Cabin	Semi-Displ. Cruiser	36' 2"	1985-90	2-200 Diesel	\$141,000	\$95,925	\$85,075
40 Double Cabin	Semi-Displ. Trawler	40' 0"	1985-90	2-220 Diesel	\$177,000	\$125,450	\$111,200
40 Sedan Bridge	Sedan Cruiser	40' 7"	1992-95	2-320 Gas	—	—	—

LOA = without bow pulpit and/or swim platform. New Boat Price is the FOB price from the ABOS Marine Blue Book, freight, dealer prep, or options. Market High and Market Low are an average of the retail highs and lows in the BUC Price Guide and the NADA Appraisal Guide. Average Depreciation calculated by averaging the highs and lows and dividing by the new boat price.

ight: The 1992 Mainship 40 Sedan  
idge has held its value as well as  
y boat we examined recently.

asonably substantial—including the  
d-looking, staple-like railings in-  
alled on the Mediterranean series.  
some respects, the Mediterraneans  
the in-between models of the  
nship line, with neither the walk-  
rough bridges or the rail-protected  
decks of the older trawlers. Al-  
ough there is a rail at the bow, most  
the passage forward requires the  
e of a handrail. Still, with a decent  
deck and toe rail, passage is more  
ure than on many similar boats.

We saw a good sampling of Main-  
ips in the field, but took a close look  
two models: a 1986 Nantucket 36  
t cabin and a 1988 Mediterranean  
-express cruiser. Both had the room-  
ess touted by Mainship owners. This  
as no surprise with the aft-cabin  
awler, but even the Express with a  
eam of 12' 9" seemed spacious and  
ry. The galley and dinette on the  
awler are two steps down and for-  
ard of the saloon, providing a good  
ense of "apartness" while lounging.  
n the 35-foot Mediterranean, galley  
d dining area are at the same level,  
at there's still a distinct lounging  
ea, well-cooled by the air condi-  
oning vent located under the dinette  
ble. The 35 also came (apparently  
andard) with an entertainment sys-



tem—stereo, CD player, TV—along  
the starboard aft side of the saloon. A  
closet forward contains a central vac-  
uum system.

Galleys have ample counter space,  
but unfortunately lack fiddles on  
counters or tables. Owners, of course,  
often make modifications to suit their  
tastes. On the 36, the original two-  
burner alcohol stove was replaced  
with a three-burner Princess propane  
stove with oven. The Mediterranean  
was equipped with a two-burner elec-  
tric stove and a microwave, but no  
oven. The owners plan to add a con-  
vection oven (available as an option  
on some newer models) and also  
longed for a larger refrigerator to cut  
down on shopping trips. The fold-  
down table on the trawler was sup-  
ported by a single leg with  
no locking mechanism—an  
oversight that reportedly re-  
sulted in a minor injury to a  
child, who bumped the leg.

Owners tended to like  
their heads, with full show-  
ers and sufficient room to  
move around. The 35's  
shower was fitted with a  
curved sliding plastic door  
that did not intrude on the  
space—a feature appreci-  
ated by the 230-pound skip-  
per. The berth in the 35's  
forward stateroom was a lit-  
tle on the small side, but the  
cabin (which contained a  
second closet) was light and

airy. Both models seemed to make  
excellent use of space, compact with-  
out being tight, roomy without un-  
needed space. By contrast, the build-  
er seemed uncertain about what to do  
with the extra volume afforded by the  
40-foot aft cabin trawler, breaking up  
the large lounge area by installing an  
odd bar counter; the larger head also  
made room for a tub—but not one big  
enough to be comfortable. Better to  
have stuck with a shower.

Helms got mixed reviews from  
owners (85-percent approval rating),  
with most much happier with the  
view from the bridge. The Nantucket  
36 lower helm, as noted in our last  
survey, is well aft of the windshield  
and has little room for gauges. There's  
good visibility from the upper helm  
station (and nice accommodations for  
passengers), but many owners found  
it necessary to lean way forward on  
their seats or stand while docking or  
anchoring. The 35 owner also found  
that the zippered bridge enclosure  
tended to leak during a downpour,  
trickling water onto the electronics  
immediately below. His solution?  
Move the passenger seats forward and  
the helm back. Another complaint  
was the leaks from the opening win-  
dows, which he sealed shut.

Mainship is constantly making  
revisions in helm and bridge design,  
though not all for the better. The 1986  
trawler, for example, was fitted with a  
mast to hold the running lights, a  
system that kept glare out of the helms-

1992 New Boat Price	1994 Market High	1994 Market Low	Average Depreci- ation
—	—	—	—
109,320	\$105,125	\$95,575	13%
106,660	\$100,325	\$82,500	14%
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
140,000	\$142,775	\$128,875	3%

note: Actual used-boat price depends upon condi-  
tion, options, and other factors. Because the new-  
at price is likely to have been higher (due to  
options, etc.), actual depreciation may be greater  
than that shown above.

man's eyes. Later versions did away with the mast and placed the lights on a bridge-mounted pole, where they can impede night vision. While the trawler was fitted with ample and adequate 10-inch cleats, the Mediterranean, as a reader noted during our 1992 survey, lacks cleats on the quarter for tying on a fender. Cleats on either side of the transom are fine for tying up, but the dock lines then block the walk-through door at the starboard end. (This owner plans to add a center cleat as a remedy.)

### The Market Tells Us...

All owners like to think their boats have held their value and Mainship buyers are no exception, with an 85-percent approval rating (about 10 points lower than their Carver comrades). In both cases, the used-boat market seems to bear the perceptions out. Relying on new-boat prices from the ABOS Blue Book and averaging

high and low market prices from the BUC and NADA appraisal guidebooks, we found that older models (1988 vintage) had depreciated anywhere from 33 to 40 percent; newer models (1992) depreciated less than 15 percent, and, in one case (the popular 40 Sedan Bridge) had actually appreciated slightly. Older Carver models, by contrast, had an average depreciation of less than 30 percent, while newer models appear to have sustained more depreciation than Mainships in most instances.

Although the appraisal guides vary widely on pricing for some Mainship models and years, asking prices in the national and regional publications we looked at tend to support the overall averages. The average price for a 1988 36-foot Double Cabin, according to the guides, was \$90,500. In contrast, most of the asking prices we saw for the 1988 boat were in the high \$80,000 range, about what is being asked for a

similar model Carver. (1982) Mainship 34, asking prices varied wildly, from \$40,000 (more than the market value of the 1988 version) to as low as \$20,000. Asking prices this spring ranged from \$46,200.

Ultimately, it's not just what you pay, but what you get for your money. And Mainship owners say either they buy new or used. "Outstanding. Where else can you get a 40-foot cruiser this well equipped for \$149,000? Not from Hatfield, Sea Ray or Bayliner, that's for sure," said one owner. And a reader who wrote: "I know the difference between a Mainship and a Hinckley, Shannon, or Carver. When I look at the similar models, I feel quite pleased with my Mainship owner."

### Conclusions/Recommendations

Readers in both our 1992 and 1993 surveys indicated that they remain satisfied with their Mainships. Most of them say they got good value for the money they paid. Mainships, like other quality yachts, have their own set of equipment drawbacks, but, as many readers claim—our survey results concur—that a well-maintained, pleasant-appearing Mainship should give years of satisfactory performance.

Those in the market for a family cruiser would do well to include Mainship in their list of options. Most of the existing boats have been improved by their owners. A significant number have been upgraded for better performance. In the same way, we always recommend a professional survey to check for obvious defects in the hull and to inspect the mechanical systems.

Mainship says their newer models—in the 35- and 40-foot range—will be a moderate improvement over the earlier models, with stronger materials that will pay for themselves in hulls and improved diesel engines (and low thrusters available) for better performance. In the meantime, there are some good deals available on older trawlers—if you can find an owner to sell.

## PBR Mini-Survey: Trojan Boats

In a continuing effort to develop insight into the used-boat market for our "Used-Boat Focus" reports, this month we're asking owners of Trojan boats to help us to help PBR readers by answering a simple set of questions. In addition to the questions below, we welcome any comments you wish to make about your boat, or the service you received and the deal you got from the dealer and/or the factory.

Please mail this survey (or a photocopy) to: Survey Editor, Powerboat Reports, Box 2626, Greenwich, CT 06836-2626; or fax it to us at 203/661-4802. Thanks—[Ed.]

Model \_\_\_\_\_

Year \_\_\_\_\_ Length \_\_\_\_\_

Power \_\_\_\_\_

Please rank (by circling) the following on a scale of 0 (poor) to 4 (excellent).

Aesthetics/Fit and Finish

0 1 2 3 4

Cockpit/Deck Layout

0 1 2 3 4

Interior Layout

0 1 2 3 4

Sleeping Accommodations

0 1 2 3 4

Galley/Head

0 1 2 3 4

Maneuverability Dockside

0 1 2 3 4

Handling at Cruising Speed

0 1 2 3 4

Engine/Mechanical Installation

0 1 2 3 4

Helm Station Comfort/Visibility

0 1 2 3 4

Overall Value for the Dollar

0 1 2 3 4

Overall Level of Satisfaction

0 1 2 3 4

Would you buy another Trojan?

Yes  No  Maybe

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

(Name and phone number may be necessary for verification purposes only; both will be held in confidence.)