



## **CHOOSING THE RIGHT KAYAK & PADDLE**

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With any sport the right equipment can make a big difference to your enjoyment, safety and most importantly how fast you go.

### **KAYAK**

There seems to be a general train of thought in NZ that the easiest way to kayak fast is to paddle the fastest boat you can find. While that may work for someone who has the correct skills it more often than not leads to high levels of frustration, slower times and swimming lessons.

The first step in choosing the right boat is to determine what events you want to compete in. If the goal is Coast to Coast for example then you have to look at the factors outside of the kayak that will affect your ability to paddle effectively. You will be tired from the previous days racing if doing the 2 day event or in the case of the 1 day event you will arrive at the kayak having already been racing for at least 6 hours. Then there are the rapids to contend with, wind and the fact that the paddle is also going to be in excess of 4 hours.

You will also want to consider where you can do most of your paddle training. If you live where there is often no flat water due to wind or exposed coast then that will have to be a consideration as to what boat you will be able to maximise your training time in.

If the goal is a different race from the Coast then again it would pay to look at the situations you are most likely to encounter and where you will also do the majority of your paddling. If the event is in the sea and that is where you will do most of your paddling then a sea kayak or surf ski might be the preferred option and will give far more scope to explore and enjoy yourself than say a dedicated river or flat water boat.

In an ideal world you could have 2 or 3 boats, or more for different races, training areas and varying conditions but for most people it is unrealistic and with one carefully thought out boat you can usually cover the majority of the situations you will encounter. For an advanced

paddler who mainly trains in the sea for example the Sharp is a great boat as it behaves much like a Long Distance surf ski but is still more than capable on a river or in flat water.

In a river situation like the Coast to Coast it becomes plainly obvious that in many cases supposedly fast boats aren't any quicker than intermediate boats or even entry level boats that are paddled to their potential. In the river you are moving fast because you are being carried along on the current but your actual boat speed is in most cases slower relative to the water you are moving through than on flat water. I've experienced this from both sides of the coin. In my first Coast I paddled an Opus, a good fast intermediate boat and was passing plenty of so called advanced boats like Evo's and UFO's. Near the end of the river though I was passed by a guy paddling a Swallow – the model down from the Opus, he was more stable, had better technique and could apply more effective power to the water and the flat water speed of the boats had very little to do with our actual paces in the race. The following year I had upgraded to an Advantage – arguably the fastest of all the Multi-sport boats in the flat water but yet I paddled almost 30 min slower despite still not having any swims. This was largely to do with most of my energy being directed towards balance and not towards making the boat go faster through the water.

One of the issues these days is there is some very good boats that will go reasonably fast and require a relatively small amount of skill to get a good result out of them. The JKK Eclipse and Total Eclipse are so stable a beginner can jump in and feel confident very quickly and with some training make the boat go very fast. This is due mainly to the fact all of their effort can go into making the boat go forward without worrying about staying upright. The most common issue though comes when they upgrade to a 'faster' boat and without the body having learnt how to stabilize their current boat it involves a fairly steep learning curve once the boat has been upgraded and for some period of time actually being slower, even on flat water than they were in their entry level boat.

If you have the option to train in a tippy boat then it can be a good addition to your skills and help you progress more quickly but remember until you can paddle a tippy boat with the same confidence as a stable boat you will often be faster in the more stable boat.

Like anything the more time you put into it the more reward you will see, train specifically, constantly look to challenge your ability and take responsibility for your skills. This will give you more enjoyment, keep you safer and make you the envy of your mates when you paddle away from them.

## **PADDLES**

Paddles come in many different shapes and sizes and to a certain extent the choice is what you personally find the most comfortable to use.

There has been a trend towards the more tear drop shaped paddles in NZ recently but there are also some very good blades with the more rectangular shape. These are often a little easier to use as they tend to be a bit more stable in the water.

The best option before buying a paddle is to try as many different shapes as possible and see what gives you the best feeling.

The other major areas to look at with paddles are the size of the blade and the length of the paddle. Most of the paddle shapes come in a variety of sizes and unless you are a sprint kayaker you will probably looking at something in the small to medium range of sizes. Technique also plays a large role in maximising the paddle you have. If you miss a lot of water in your catch you will find you continually spin regardless of the blade size and will

have trouble keeping a good speed. To combat this it is often a case of improving efficiency of technique rather than looking for the solution in a different paddle.

The length will depend a bit on your height but probably more by what length of race you are planning on doing and whether you will be paddling in rivers, the sea or flat water. A really good option is to get an adjustable length paddle as you can then change your paddle to suit the various conditions.

A good general rule is that the longer the race the shorter your paddle should be. I also find I paddle a shorter paddle on the river than in the sea or on flat water. That is due to the fact you are travelling at a slower relative speed to the water in a river and so you are able to create more tension on the water more often which results in more fatigue.

The other consideration for paddle length is seat height. In a Multi-sport boat you are usually seated very close the bottom of the boat so the length of the paddle can't be too long or it will go too deep in the water. Conversely in a K1 or surf ski where you are seated higher up a couple of extra cm's can help position the paddle at the correct height in the water.

As a rough guide for length a male paddler 175-185cm tall could look at a paddle around 214-216 for flat water and ocean training, dropping to 212 for rivers and racing up to moderate distances and dropping again to 210cm for longer river paddles or very long racing.

Female paddler 165-175cm tall could look at a paddle around 208-210 for flat water and ocean training dropping to 206 for rivers and racing up to moderate distances and dropping to 204 for longer river paddles or very long races.