

# How to Buy a Kayak

From the staff at BayCreek Paddling Center  
Version 1.0

## **So You are Thinking of Getting a Kayak!**

The process of selecting the boat that's just right for you can be a wonderful journey of exploration and discovery, but at the same time it can also be a daunting maze full of strange jargon, conflicting advice and confounding tradeoffs.

We wrote this guide to try to help you through the process - to help you determine what your desires are and what type of boat will best fit those needs. We are not going to recommend particular boats, just kayak types. This booklet will help you narrow your search, but beyond that, we prefer the good old seat of the pants mode – getting your butt in the boat and taking her for a spin.

It would be correct to say that a kayak is a means of transportation over water. But the truth of the matter is a kayak can do much more than that. It can transport you into another realm of being, one filled with relaxation and mindless pleasure. It can transport you to remote beaches and far away campsites. It can propel you across the water with exhilarating speed, building and toning your upper and core body. Part of our challenge in this booklet is to open your eyes to the POSSIBILITIES – possibilities that offer a lifetime of enjoyment.

This brochure was written as an aid for you. But, by all means, if you still have questions, come talk to us or send us an email at [info@baycreek.com](mailto:info@baycreek.com).

So let's begin.

## **Should I get a Kayak or a Canoe?**

Both are great crafts. A tandem canoe is a good choice for a young family or a couple with a desire to carry gear or a dog. If camping is in your dreams, a canoe is much easier to portage (carry) than most kayaks and a better choice for most treks in the Adirondacks. Solo canoes are personal boats as are solo kayaks. However the skill set needed to control them, particularly in wind and waves, is much greater than that for kayaks.

Kayaks now out sell canoes by 20:1, or more, because of their ease of use and their efficiency. With a lower center of gravity, a double bladed paddle and less area to catch the wind, kayaks are generally more seaworthy, move with less effort and require less skill to achieve basic control.

## **Should I Buy that Kayak at ..... (fill in the box store of your choice...WalMart, BJ's, Dicks, etc.)?**

This may surprise you coming from a kayak specialty shop like us, but the answer might be yes. If you are simply looking for a boat to occasionally get on the water and don't expect it to get much use, or you need something at the cottage for the kids, then by all means get the least expensive boat that meets your requirements. But, if this doesn't describe your needs then a boat featured as "this week's special" could well prove to be a disappointment. It is extremely important to demo a boat of your interests in order to confirm comfort, fit and performance. Your kayak is an investment. We want to make sure you invest wisely and for the long term.

## **Should I get Instruction First?**

Getting quality instruction can help your selection process because it will expose you to kayak nomenclature and to the basic strokes of propulsion and control. But if you are really new to the sport, you must realize that it will take some time and some practice for you to internalize the skills to precisely control your boat. Fortunately, the learning curve is relatively easy to climb, but it still takes time. So the

answer to this is that it is helpful, but not mandatory. Here at BayCreek, our classes, “Basics of Kayaking” and “Intermediate Kayaking”, are free and unlimited with your qualifying boat purchase. We give away these valuable lessons because we want you to enjoy your kayak to the fullest. However, the main thing for you to keep in mind is that your skills will increase over time. Make sure that the boat you pick doesn’t limit your growth and enjoyment after just a few months.

### **Should I Get a Kayak with a Rudder?**

We’d be jumping ahead in tackling this question now, but since we mentioned control in the paragraph above it is only natural to have this question pop into your head. So, hold that thought as the answer is - it depends.

### **What’s What with the Material Choices?**

There are three classes of materials from which production boats are made. We have excluded wood since these are usually home-built or very limited production. The three material classes are:

1. Rotomolded, also known as polyethylene or poly.
2. Thermoform, also know by trade names such as Trylon, Carbon Lite, Airalite, etc.,
3. Composite, the general name for fiberglass, kevlar and carbon fiber boats.

Rotomolded kayaks are produced from a plastic powder poured into a heated metal mold. The heat melts the plastic as the mold is rotated and the inside of the mold gets coated with a layer of plastic. Sometimes multiple layers with different properties are created to improve the strength to weight ratio of the final product. After the mold cools, it is opened to reveal a hollow kayak shell. It only remains to cut a holes in the hollow shell for hatches and cockpit and to outfit the boat with a seat, deck rigging, etc.

Pro’s for Rotomolded kayaks:

- Less expensive process hence less expensive kayaks
- Very impact resistant (few repair bills)
- Withstands abrasion (even road rash)
- Terrific for whitewater, shallow creeks, rocky beaches and other places with a hull is likely to take a beating.

Con’s for Rotomolded Kayaks:

- Usually heavier then the other processes. (can present a challenge getting on the car’s top)
- Gouges easily – Over time abrasion creates a rough surface increasing friction and slowing the boat.
- Plastic flow - Over time, hulls often distort and become less efficient, hydrodynamically.
- Not rigid – This is a little subtle, but when a kayak flexes in waves or flexes during acceleration, some energy is redirected and the boat can feel sluggish. While subtle, this may be the biggest reason serious flatwater kayakers prefer other materials.

Thermoformed kayaks are formed from sheets of ABS plastic heated in an oven and then pulled into a mold by means of vacuum pressure. The deck is formed from one sheet and the hull from another. These are then trimmed and seamed together. The rest of the outfitting is then completed.

Pro’s for Thermoform Kayaks:

- Attractive material – smooth and shiny. Often mistaken for fiberglass at a glance.
- Tough – withstands impact and abrasion well
- No plastic flow – doesn’t lose shape over time.
- More rigid than rotomold– less distortion in waves and under acceleration.
- Lighter than rotomold.
- Less expensive than composite processes.

Con’s for Thermoform

- Not as impact and abrasion resistant as poly boats.
- Occasionally cracks – but is repairable
- Not as light as some composite boats

Composite kayaks are constructed of woven fabrics and liquid resins. The fabrics are made from fiberglass, kevlar, carbon fiber, or some combination of these. Typically gel coat is sprayed into the mold first and then various layers of fabric are placed on top of that. Resin is applied to saturate the fabric, either by hand or with the use of vacuum pressure. Resin infusion and vacuum bagging are different processes but both attempt to achieve full saturation of the fabric with a minimum of excess resin. These processes produce stiff and light boats. The various resins used by boat builders are polyvinylester, polyester and epoxy. Each has its strengths and weaknesses.

Pro's for Composite Kayaks:

- Lightest processes – in decreasing order by weight: fiberglass, kevlar, carbon fiber.
- Attractive – beautiful glossy gel coated exteriors in custom colors or “high tech” clear coats.
- Stiff – in increasing order: fiberglass, kevlar, carbon fiber.
- Fine detail – material not limited in shape or sharp features.

Con's for Composite Kayaks:

- More easily damaged (from minor cosmetic chips in gel coat to full through hull punctures), but not fragile.
- Most expensive due to the premium materials and the human craftsmanship.

### **So Many Kayaks, What is a Buyer to Do?**

A customer came into the shop one day looking somewhat bewildered and asked “Why are there so many kayaks to choose from?” We answered– “Why are there so many trees, grasshopper?” Sorry, we couldn't resist throwing in a little zen. Actually, there are many different intentions for kayaks and many different body types and sizes that are going to sit in them. Depending upon your desires, a kayak can be a boat you sit in or a boat you wear. To help with the selection process we are going to break it down into 4 steps:

- I. What do you want to do with your kayak?
- II. What should you know about the category of kayaks that fit your desires?
- III. Selecting the kayak with the features, performance and fit you want.
- IV. Justifying the investment?

Hopefully going through the process in these steps will help you navigate the maze.

### **Step I. What Do You Want to Do With Your Kayak?**

We are going to describe 6 main categories of uses. These descriptions provide the first filter in our selection process and they will help us significantly narrow the task of finding the right kayak for you. At the boundaries of some of these 6 categories, there are boat designs that encompass some attributes of the neighboring categories. The 6 categories are listed below and we will take them one at a time.

1. Fishing/Hunting
2. Recreational paddling
3. White water paddling
4. Light touring
5. Tripping / sea kayaking
6. Fitness paddling / racing

As you read the descriptions below, keep an open mind to the full range of things YOU might want to do. We suggest you put a check mark by your main interests and a circle by your potential or secondary interests. Perhaps it will help zeroing in on the category for your first (or next) kayak.

#### **CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITIES!**

I want a kayak .....

Fishing / Hunting

- To take me to the backwaters for the lunker bass.
- To troll for pike and maybe even lake trout.
- To enter this year's fishing tournament in the kayak category.

- To take on vacation so I can fish some different waters.
- To take my retriever and me into the marshes for some great duck hunting.
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### Recreational Paddling

- To paddle around at our cottage and something for the kids/ grandkids to use.
- To float around the pond/lake enjoying the sun, water and breeze.
- To take short day trips along the shore of the lake on calm days.
- To occasionally drop a fishing line and pass some quality time.
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### Whitewater Paddling

- To float the local creeks in the springtime
- To rodeo the big holes
- To race the slalom course
- To paddle the rivers in the north country/Pennsylvania/W. Virginia
- To take on my cross-country vacation
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### Light Touring

- To glide across the waters and over boat wakes.
- To tour the Finger Lakes on day paddles.
- To take on vacation to the Adirondacks
- To paddle with my friends who have these kayaks
- To get some fresh air and exercise after work.
- To take me on overnight and week-end trips.
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### Tripping / Sea Kayaking

- To take me on camping trips.
- To undertake a lifelong pursuit of skills mastery
- To play among the waves of the Great Lakes.
- To explore coastal waters.
- To use for exercise on waters around home.
- To take me on extended expeditions.
- To circumnavigate Ireland.
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### Fitness / Racing

- To propel myself swiftly and easily over the water.
- To increase my upper body and core strength.
- To improve my balance over time.
- To get an aerobic workout under the most pleasant of conditions.
- To replace joint stressing activities like running, tennis, basketball, etc that I can no longer do.
- To replace biking with its risks of serious injury.
- To test myself in races around the state – e.g., the Adirondack 90 Miler, the Empire States
- To train for the Olympics.
- \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you have opened your mind to the range of possibilities for your new kayak, look to see where the preponderance of YOUR checkmarks reside. As we mentioned above, some categories overlap a bit, so study the sections below for all that interests you. Try to select a boat that meets most of your interests or possible interests. However, no kayak does everything and if you become as enamored with this sport as we are, expect to have more than one kayak.

#### What you should know about – FISHING KAYAKS

We are going to have to pass on this section as we do not sell kayaks specifically designed for fishing and we are not qualified to advise you. So, if fishing is your principle interest, please seek advice qualified sources. Perhaps in the future, we will be able to support this category.

#### What you should know about – RECREATIONAL KAYAKS

- Boats in this class are generally 9 to 12 feet long. Because of this relatively short length, the boats have to be wider to provide adequate buoyancy. This increased width gives the boats great initial stability and a sense of security while paddling the back waters and gentle streams. And, these kayaks may be outfitted to facilitate fishing.
- There is a drawback to high initial stability - the hull wants follow the surface of the water. So, in waves, the boat tips to follow the surface of the wave. This tendency reduces the seaworthiness of this category, so they are best used in flat conditions to waves not exceeding 1 foot.
- Recreational kayaks also generally come with larger cockpits than kayaks of other categories, making entry and exit easier.
- Sit-on-top designs in this category are very popular in the southern regions and along the coasts. They are less popular in northern waters due to the fact that the paddler often sits in a wet seat well. The designs of sit-on-tops in this category usually favor high degrees of stability at the sacrifice of paddling ease and performance. However, the stability and the ease of climbing back on after exiting make sit-on-tops a good choice for a cottage boat that renters and children can easily use, for diving and for fishing.

#### What you should know about – WHITEWATER KAYAKS

This is another area we currently do not support. Please seek advice from other qualified sources.

#### What you should know about – LIGHT TOURING KAYAKS

- This is the most popular category in our area, Western New York, due to the abundance of flat water that we have. These kayaks are great for paddling on the Finger Lakes and the creeks, rivers and bays of our area.
- Light touring kayaks are generally 13 to 15 feet in length with beams of 22 to 25 inches. Being longer and usually narrower than recreational kayaks, these kayaks have greater speed (glide) for a given amount of energy. They are very good for day trips up to 10 or so miles.
- With a length of 13 to 15 ft, these kayaks will handle moderate waves, say 1.5 to 2 feet, fairly well. In rougher conditions, they tend to get pushed around a lot. So, making headway in a choppy, windy conditions can be somewhat difficult.
- Usually these kayaks are built with bulkhead (walls) creating dry compartments in the bow and stern. Hatches are hole cut in the deck for access to the compartments. Hatch covers seal the hatch from water.
- The existence of water-tight compartments in the bow and stern of a kayak adds a safety factor to the kayak. If swamped, the kayak will continue to float level in the water and can be re-entered using a number of techniques. Kayaks with only one compartment (either bow or stern) pose a risk as they may tend to stand vertical in the water if flooded and are much more difficult in rescue situations. Kayaks without any dry compartments also pose problems in rescue situations.
- Bow and stern compartments in light touring kayaks are usually sufficient in size for overnight and weekend camping trips.
- Manufacturers in recent years have focused on the seating for these boats. We recommend looking for a comfortable seat with a minimum of gimmicky adjustments.
- Light touring kayaks are available as sit-on-tops and conventional sit-in or decked boats. While sit-on-tops are very popular in the South, the colder waters of the North make them less desirable. Designs of sit-on-top light touring kayaks also tend to favor the novice kayaker, typically being wider and offering less performance.
- Cockpits in these kayaks are usually big enough to allow easy enter into the boat and yet small enough to accommodate the use of a spray skirt.

- A spray skirt is an accessory that surrounds the paddlers waist and covers the cockpit opening. Using a spray skirts seals the kayak against water from rain, spray and submersion. It also creates a warm dry environment for your lower body. Because of this added comfort, paddling seasons can be extended later in the Fall and resume earlier in the Spring. (note: you should also dress appropriate for colder water these times of the year)
- Light touring boats are available in many materials, ranging from less expensive rotomolded polyethylene to thermo-formed plastic and to composite materials (fiberglass, kevlar and carbon fiber).

#### What you should know about – SEA KAYAKS

- Sea Kayaks are the closest descendants to the original Greenland and Aleut hunting kayaks of early natives. In the beginning, kayaks were functional rather than recreational, serving as an efficient way to travel and gather food. Amazingly enough, the differences between modern descendants of Greenland kayaks and Aleutian kayaks remain prominent. British-style sea kayaks are distinctly influenced by the Greenland tradition while West Coast-style kayaks have a strong resemblance to Aleut kayaks.
- Sea Kayaks, for all intensive purposes, are split into two distinct categories.
  - ⇒ **Fast Touring Kayaks** share some of the characteristics of the early Aleut designs of the Pacific North West, such as higher volume bows and slightly longer water lines. Modern fast touring kayaks are now usually controlled with rudders more than paddle strokes. Their long water line allows for speed and efficiency when traveling from one point to another.
  - ⇒ **Open Water Sea kayaks** or **British Style Sea Kayaks** can be traced back to the kayaks of East and West Greenland, the main difference between these two being the fit of the kayak to the paddler. These boats tend to lend themselves to a technical style of paddling. That means that there are no rudders to control the kayak, only proper technique that combines paddle strokes, leaning, and edging. Because of the maneuverability of these boats, a skeg is sometimes used to aid in tracking. These boats will not be as fast as the Pacific North West boats due to a shorter water line and greater rocker. However they will be much more agile in rough water and more maneuverable on smaller waterways.
- Sea Kayaks are usually between 16’ and 19’ in length. A 16’ kayak makes a nice day tripping / Surf play boat. The 18’ and longer kayaks are generally used for longer expeditions when greater capacity for gear is required. 17’ kayaks are commonly referred to as “Jacks Of All Trades”: all-round sea kayaks that are proficient at a number of things but doesn’t specialize in any one category.
- Sea kayaks are generally made of polyethylene, thermo-formed plastic, and composites (see the materials section to determine what lay-up fits your needs)
- Sea kayaks are designed to be paddled in a wide range conditions and climates. For that reason they have safety features such as full perimeter deck lines, bulkheads and end grabs to assist with emergency rescues. Sea kayaks will have a cockpit combing that will allow the use of a spray skirt. A skirt will allow you to: 1) Take full advantage of the secondary stability of your kayak and 2) Extend your paddling season by allowing you to start earlier in the spring and end later in the fall.
- The stability of a sea kayak will depend heavily on the boat design you choose. Most of the fast touring kayaks will have a more rounded or “V” type hull which will result in a kayak with less initial stability. At rest these kayaks could be considered “tippy”. However, once this type of design gains forward momentum it will feel more stable. British sea kayaks will have a bit more initial stability, the main reason being a flatness to the hull beneath the cockpit otherwise known as a “Shallow V” design. This is especially useful for expedition paddlers that need to be stable when at rest in order to read charts and shoot compass bearings. Don’t be fooled though, these British boats have enormous secondary stability due to the chine of the hull.
- Things to think about:
  - ⇒ Will I be paddling with others? If so, what do they paddle as I might want a boat of similar abilities.
  - ⇒ What type of conditions will I be paddling in? Flatwater, Rough water or both.
  - ⇒ How interested am I in technically sound paddling?

- ⇒ Is weight and ease of carrying/car-topping the kayak important?
- ⇒ Is space for gear and long trips a consideration?
- ⇒ How hard do I use my toys? (This can have a huge impact on the lay-up and options you choose)
  - (1) I baby my things to the point of being obsessive
  - (2) I use my things the way they are meant to be used
  - (3) I abuse my things to the point of being careless

#### What you should know about – FITNESS / RACING KAYAKS

- Paddling any kayak involves exercise. The main difference is what kind of exercise. A short, wide recreational boat has a lot of resistance moving through the water, so the workout is a resistance type, similar to lifting weights, and generally you don't want to do it for very long. A racing boat offers much less resistance moving through the water, so the workout is more aerobic, similar to biking, but without the risk of serious injury. Because it is less fatiguing you can do it for hours at a time.
- Sub classes within the fitness category
  - Fast touring kayaks (these blend touring with fitness with racing and are generally the most stable). Examples: Epic's 16X and 18X, Kayak Pro's Nemo and Marlin
  - Sprint kayaks (these 17 ft boats and they vary from relatively stable trainers to elite boats) Great for fitness and racing on flat waters. Examples: Kayak Pro's Jet and Burn and Epic's Legacy.
  - Open water racing kayaks: Sit-in kayaks typically 19+ ft long with moderate stability. Great for training or racing larger bodies of water. Examples: Valley Rapier 20, Kayak Pro Vampire.
  - Surf Ski's: Open water kayaks great for waters with 2+ foot waves. Surfing waves moving downrange can be very exhilarating. Examples: Epic V10S, V10, V12
- Fitness kayaks are usually between 16 and 21 ft in length. Below 16 feet, kayaks are generally too slow for the best workout and are not competitive in races. Above 21 feet, kayak speed generally falls off due to increased surface friction. Kayaks 18 feet and less generally race in a touring class. Some events offer a class for boats 20 ft or less as long as the width is 18" or more. Longer and narrower boats typically race in the Unlimited Class. Olympic sprint kayaks have to measure 520cm, about 17' 1" or less.
- Fitness kayaks typically have rudders so that you need not deviate from your power forward stroke to make course corrections. All are foot controlled, either sliding foot pegs, toe pedals or tiller bars.
- Most fitness kayaks are made from composite materials, such as, fiberglass, kevlar and carbon fiber. A few are made in roto-molded polyethylene. The lighter and stiffer the boat, the better it's performance (speed and acceleration). A poly boat can serve for getting started in the sport, but designs and performance are very limited. A fiberglass boat will serve the fitness paddler / casual racer well, while kevlar and carbon fiber are best for the more competitive racers.
- Some fitness / racing kayaks are sit-in boats with cockpits and some are sit-on-tops, for example surf skis. Sit-in boats can generally be fitted with spray skirts that enclose the "hole" in the boat, making it drier and warmer to paddle. Skirts also prevent the boat from filling with water when paddling in waves or heavy rain. These boats are particularly popular in the north where spring and fall waters and weather are cool. Sit-on-top kayaks are typically paddled without sprayskirts as the boats are self bailing. They are great for southern climes and summer in the north.
- A surf ski is a special type of sit-on-top kayak. They are designed to paddle waters with waves and to surf or pick up speed on the downside of waves. They also perform perfectly well on flat waters, although they might give up a little in speed to boats designed solely for flat water. Surf skis sold in the US are generally 19 – 21 feet in length although shorter versions do exist. Reentry after capsize is also relatively easy as there is no deck to hinder entry and no cockpit to be pumped out.
- Fitness and racing kayaks tend to be TIPPY, because a narrow boat offers less resistance moving through the water. Olympic sprint boats, for example, are extremely tippy and most paddlers would be unable to even get away from the dock without capsizing. But, sprint trainers are much more stable. Other fitness kayaks offer varying degrees of stability.

- Stability is a personal thing. Weight, body shape, natural balance capability all factor into the perception of stability. A first-time buyer needs to be realistic about his/her capability and the rate at which (s)he can improve. A youngster may find a boat initially very tippy, but then have a very rapid learning curve. A senior may not progress as far or as fast in balancing skills. Its important to figure out what is right for you. Learning to balance offers a stimulating challenge, and narrower boats are generally faster. But many boats are bought and eventually sold because the owner can not get comfortable with the tippiness.
- Recognize that if you are new to the sport, learning the correct forward stroke represents a substantial challenge, one that is hindered if the learner is unable to balance confidently.
- While touring kayakers paddle with their legs apart and locked under thigh braces for stability, most racing kayaks are designed to be paddled with knees up and together. These boat often have foot boards that extend across the full hull to allow feet to be placed together. The knees up position allows the paddler to drive with the legs and aids in torso rotation, but it doesn't provide any stability aid. Therefore when paddling in this position, balance is maintained with body control.
- The back support of fitness kayaks can range from minimal to non-existent. This is because fitness paddlers do not want anything impeding their torso rotation. An upright posture is essential and it is obtained by use of the abdominal muscles and by the pull the forward stroke itself. If looking for a boat to paddle for fitness and it has a extensive back support, be wary, as it may cause problems.
- Other factors to think about –
  - ⇒ Will I be paddling with others? If so what do they paddle as I might want get something similar.
  - ⇒ Will I mostly paddle flat water? If so, sprint boats and sprint trainers are an option.
  - ⇒ Will I want to paddle rougher waters? Think fast touring or surf ski.
  - ⇒ Can I accommodate a long (19-21ft) kayak in my garage?
  - ⇒ Is weight and ease of carrying and / or car-topping the kayak important? If so, think kevlar or carbon.

### **Section III - Selecting a Kayak with the Features, Performance and Fit you Want.**

Alright. If you are reading here, then hopefully we've helped you pick the right category or categories and now you just need to narrow the search to find the kayak with the features, performance and fit you want.

We are going to suggest a bit of research at this point, but with a high dose of caution. A lot of what you read on the web is just plain WRONG. Everyone has an opinion, and will state it with conviction. But, that doesn't make it right. Lot's of folks are avid kayakers, but many of them lack basic skills. So, do you want to trust their critique of a boat? Then again, experts have the opposite problem. They don't necessarily see things from the perspective of a beginner. Manufacturers often write very flowery descriptions of their boats, some of which bear little resemblance to the facts. The bottom line is - keep an open mind and the only opinion that counts is yours.

Given these caveats, we suggest you visit our website, [www.baycreek.com](http://www.baycreek.com) and study the kayaks we carry in the category or categories that meet your interests. You'll find the specs and you'll find the manufacturer's comments. For some kayaks, we have added our own, BayCreek comments, and we are working on adding comments to the other boats. We have tried to be realistic. Keep an open mind.

Now, you are ready to visit a shop. Tell the folks at the shop what you desire in a kayak and any particular boats you are interested in. This will narrow the candidates down to a few boats they carry. Next, you are going to observe the kayak's visual appearance, lift the boat and then sit in the boat. Pay special attention to the comfort of the seating and how the boat conforms to your body.

Here's a list of initial considerations:

1. Is the kayak attractive to you? Does it have nice lines and appealing colors?
2. Is the weight ok ? Does it balance well on your shoulder? Will you be able to handle it on and off the cartop and carry it to the water?

3. How does the seat feel? The thigh braces? The seat back?
4. Is there adequate foot room? Do the foot braces adjust easily and feel comfortable?
5. If equipped with hatches are the compartments big enough for your gear? Do the covers fit tight? Can you get them on and off reasonably easily? Are the hatch covers tethered so you won't accidentally lose them?

If the kayak passes these initial screens the next step is to paddle the boat. What, you can't? Some shops aren't located on water or they are reluctant to allow you to try out boats. If you can't paddle the boat and have no other means to try one out, we suggest you find another retailer. How a boat feels to you on the water is equally, if not more, important than the initial fit.

Okay, so now you are going to demo a kayak. What should you pay special attention to?

Here's a checklist for the test paddle:

1. Is it easy to enter the kayak? Keep in mind what other situations you might encounter. A dock? A beach? A bank?
2. How's the initial stability? Do you feel stable as you wiggle your hips side to side a little?
3. This next question applies mostly to light touring, touring and fitness kayaks. How's the secondary stability? If you are proficient with bracing, you can just heel the boat on edge and feel the force resisting capsizes. If you are not skilled in this technique, use a dock or something stationary that you can hold on to as you lean the boat toward the supporting object (dock, etc.). Again, feel the force resisting capsizes.
4. How well does the kayak track, that is, does it maintain course well? If you have any wind, try paddling with the wind coming from the side. Does the kayak want to turn upwind? Downwind (particularly bad) or does it stay neutral?
5. If the boat has a skeg or rudder, deploy the device and test how well it aids tracking. If it's a fitness boat, determine how well the rudder provides steering control.
6. If the kayak is not rudder controlled, determine how well it changes direction while underway. Use a couple of sweep strokes on one side of the kayak to see how much the course changes. If you want a quick maneuvering kayak, this will be important. For a cruising kayak, it is a bit less important.
7. From a stationary position, test how well the boat accelerates? Does it seem lively or sluggish or something in between?
8. How do you feel about the width of the kayak? Do you feel it's too wide to make paddling comfortable and efficient? Is there any tendency to rap your knuckles?
9. And now, after doing all this, is the seating still comfortable? If not, would simple modifications solve the problem?

#### **Step IV – Justifying the Investment**

This is an individual decision. We can only point out that a kayak can last a lifetime and it can provide hours upon hours of pleasure and relief from everyday stress. It burns no gas. It requires no license. You can store it in the garage. If you live in Western New York or a similar area, water is never far away. It gets you outdoors. Using it burns off calories. Your health may improve. It can lead you on a lifelong pursuit of paddling skills. It can take you on adventures. It can take you into nature..... We could go on and on.

#### **Glossary**

- ◆ **Bow** – Front of the boat
- ◆ **Bulk Head** – A watertight compartment providing internal floatation and dry storage.
- ◆ **Chine** – The area on the hull where the horizontal and the vertical meet. This angle can be hard or soft depending on the design of the boat.
- ◆ **Cockpit Combing** – The rim around the cockpit of a kayak that allows a spray skirt to be attached
- ◆ **Deck** – Top of the boat

- ◆ **End Grabs** – Hand toggles located at the bow and stern of a boat used to grab a boat in rescue situations, carry an unloaded boat or used to tie a boat down when loaded on a car top
- ◆ **Full Perimeter Deck Lines** – A low stretch static rope that follows the perimeter of a kayak allowing a capsized kayaker or rescuer to grab the a kayak
- ◆ **Hull** – Bottom of the boat
- ◆ **Initial Stability** – The first feeling of the kayak beneath you and whether it feels “stable” or not.
- ◆ **Lay-up** – The material kayak is made of
- ◆ **Port** – Left side
- ◆ **Rocker** - The curve of the boats hull from bow to stern (like a banana)
- ◆ **Rudder** - A mechanical fin controlled by the paddler’s feet to help with course maintenance. Rudder’s can be raised and lowered from the stern of a kayak (an over stern rudder) or permanently protruding from under the stern of the boat (an under stern rudder).
- ◆ **Secondary Stability** – How stable the boat feels when it is put on edge
- ◆ **Skeg** – A retractable fin lowered from under the stern of the kayak to aid with tracking when paddling in high winds. Typically deployed by the paddler via a sliding cable system or a rope and bungee system.
- ◆ **Starboard** – Right side
- ◆ **Stern** – Back of the boat
- ◆ **Tracking** – The ability of a boat to paddle straight without the aid of rudders, skegs or correctional paddle strokes.
- ◆ **Water Line** - The length of the boats hull (bow to stern) that is in actual contact with the water