

## Canoes vs. Kayaks vs. Pontoon Boats.

All boats have these things in common:

**No boat is perfect** for every task....Every boat has its limitations.

Longer boats are generally more **efficient** to paddle: they're faster, track better and draw less water, and may be more seaworthy and hold more gear and heavier paddlers...but they don't turn as quickly....and will be heavier. 15-17+ feet.

Boats with keels and ridges and channels on the bottom don't turn as easy and tend to hang on rocks.

Boaters can fall out of, or off of, all these boats. All boats can turn over...capsize...depending on waves, current, snagged anchors, "sweepers and paddler's lean..."

**Lessons/clinics/rescue practice** will enhance your skills and make paddling safer

Which to buy?....Solution:

Own one of each and pick and choose which one is best for each excursion....

OR...buy one that is best suited for the majority of fishing situations you encounter and suits your **budget** and **your ability to pick it up and transport it on, or with, your vehicle.** Remember, advertising is to make a product attractive and appealing and usually doesn't point out the product's negative aspects.

Likewise, a guy who has invested hundreds or thousands of dollars in a boat is not likely to say he made a mistake in his choice of watercraft. Review the products; read the forums; ask questions; talk to folks that own them; test paddle/row if you can; and take a cold, hard look at your own physical abilities.

With watercraft, that old saying certainly rings true..."one man's meat is another man's poison."

### **Canoes:**

Perhaps the **best all-around** watercraft...used for hundreds of years...for all types of purposes. Can be paddled, rowed, sailed or used with an electric or gasoline outboard (using a motor bracket) Handles best if you **learn and practice** a few strokes: J stoke, draw stroke, pry stroke, sweep and sculling. OR use a double-bladed paddle (just like a kayak)

Handles **excellent as a Solo** boat (paddled by one person) IF you **sit in the center** of the canoe...just like in a kayak...learning the C-stroke and others becomes much more important OR use a double-bladed paddle. Will carry one, two, three or more people and their equipment. Most versatile is 15-17 feet and **without** a keel. There are shorter canoes (which may be lighter)...but shorter sacrifices load and people carrying ability, speed, and tracking. If paddling with a partner, **training and practice** is important to maximize each paddler's potential and minimize the frustration of fretting and arguing over whether the other person is doing it "right."

A canoe seat is higher than a kayak...so you have a little better visibility and you can easily **change your positions** to sit, or kneel, or kneel on one knee...or even stand...and they are easy to get in and out of, especially as you get older and/or larger. There are **right and wrong ways** to get in and out of a canoe...learn them. And yes, you can easily

stand in most canoes if you use some common sense; the weight is distributed evenly front to back; you put your feet wide apart, and lean you leg against a seat or thwart.

About 60# is the upper limit of what most middle-aged and older can pick up by themselves. That means a hull of Royalex for all around use, in a well-designed canoe, about 15-16 in length. Kevlar and some Fiberglass is lighter but not suited for rivers/rocks etc. Aluminum is no longer a good choice. Less expensive plastics may be durable enough but get heavier; and may be poor designs. .

Transport: cartop; utility trailer; or specialty trailer. If your vehicle has a roof rack, it is probably suitable for one boat...and not necessary to buy a more expensive rack). If not rack special foam block kits provide a less expensive option. For cartopping, buy straps specifically designed for cartopping (no ratchets or metal hooks). In addition to straps, tie the boat front and rear to the vehicle...especially for highway speeds.

Best purchased from a well-known manufacturer: Bell, Wenonah, Mad River, Old Town.

### **Kayaks:**

Slightly more specialized and not as versatile...and usually solo craft. Types: Sit In...and Sit On Tops Most versatile?...**Sit In** ....14-17 feet long...with a rudder...more paddler protection and lower center of gravity and more seaworthy hull design, more cargo space for camping. If no watertight compartments...add dry bags/flotation to make **rescue and re-righting** easier in the event of a capsize. Most popular for shallow or calm, warm-water fishing, and moving water are **Sit On Tops** (SOTs) 10-14 feet long. Easy to get on and off of in shallow water. And, if they capsize...cannot fill up with water...thus relatively easy to climb back aboard...even in deep water. SOTs are probably more popular for fishing...but a Sit In can also be a good fishing craft.

Seat comfort, back support, knee and leg room and foot pedals/rests are very important...you cannot change positions in most Sit-in kayaks. Older paddlers may find this uncomfortable. SOTs offer more options. In calm water, younger, slimmer, more flexible paddlers may be able to **stand (to stretch or fish)** on models with enhanced stability...and in shallow water (if there is any) you can get out and stretch. **Standing** in many SOT kayaks may be more advertising than practical...and is usually only efficient if the seat is significantly higher than your feet **and/or** you have something to pull yourself to a standing position. (remember, the higher you sit or stand, the higher the center of gravity becomes and the easier it is to lose your balance and fall off, or capsize.)

Kayaks are low to the water and have little freeboard or sail area. Being lower, they are less susceptible to being blown around in the wind...but only less so.... And, being lower, or having lower sides, means they can take on more water (like a drop or rapids in a river) and perhaps more splash to get gear and paddler wet. This may not be a concern for a whitewater paddler, but it may be a major factor for fishermen and pleasure paddlers, particularly in cold weather and cold water.

Construction is typically roto-molded plastic and is tough, but is **not light**. A 14 foot canoe and a 14 foot kayak will probably weigh about the same and it **may well be that a plastic kayak is heavier** than a Royalex canoe. Just because it's a kayak does not mean it is light...pay close **attention to the weight** of a boat and **don't over estimate your ability** to actually lift it over your head. (there are options for cartopping) Kayaks, by design, are NOT quite as easy as a canoe to pick up over your head and carry, or load on top of a vehicle...unless grab handles are mounted in the exact center and the weight is light enough for YOU to handle. Molded handles make picking-up easier than flexible strap handles.

Transport: cartop; utility trailer, or specialty trailer. Basically the same as for canoes

Kayaks handle best if you learn strokes like draw, pry, sweep and sculling (and a couple of others) and proper paddling technique... but most folks can do okay without learning these strokes and rely on the "common sense" application of double-bladed paddling.

**Learn proper rescue and safety techniques for either boat...**

### **Hull Design in canoes and kayaks...often a compromise...**

A good canoe from a well-respected manufacturer will have a good hull design, without a keel. It will track in a straight line when paddled properly; will turn when intended; and will have a very reasonable amount of stability in a variety of water conditions. Some designs excel at tracking on flat water lakes over long distances and have very little rocker (curve in the hull along the keel line from front to rear). Others excel at river paddling where maneuvering around rocks, ledges, trees etc. places a greater emphasis on turning and slipping or sliding the canoe to one side or the other; and have a smooth hull which can slide over and off of obstructions... without keels, ridges and indentations to grab and catch on rocks.

Kayaks can have similar features, benefits and detriments. Longer touring kayaks are designed to track well and require more effort to turn, so they are not as good in many river situations, but excel in large lakes, sounds, oceans. Many of the shorter kayaks sacrifice tracking due to their length...and keels and ridges are added to improve tracking. But, these keels, ridges and indentations can create a real headache, catching and hanging up on rocks etc. In some cases, these keels and channels are added to increase the rigidity of an otherwise soft and flexible hull that slows paddling. Some of the kayak hull designs are also to promote stability, especially for folks that may want to stand. And, while these keels/underwater pontoons/"tunnel hulls" may aid in stability in flat water, they reduce maneuverability in rocky rivers and promote hangups....

Remember...what is your **primary use?...**and can you live with **compromise?**

### **Pontoon Boats and Rafts**

These are also very popular...perhaps most so for use on moving rivers. They are very stable; comfortable, can carry some gear; good ones are surprisingly tough and rugged;

and make great fishing platforms. But, they are not fast; are susceptible to wind; are not good for rowing upstream against the current; can be bulky and awkward to transport. For maximum enjoyment and efficiency (and safety) you should learn the basics about rowing and maneuvering boats with oars, especially if using in moving water with rapids that are class 2 or worse.. On a long, slow stretch of river, you may need to row much more than you anticipate. And, in a headwind (even with a reasonable current flow), progress can be agonizingly slow (or almost impossible) and may require a lot of hard work rowing against the wind. Boats with long, level pontoons track better. Pontoons that are curved (have a lot of rocker) don't track as well but turn easier.

You will want a hand pump for inflating...and you must monitor and manage the air pressure with changes in elevation when trailering, and especially as temperatures rise and fall during the day and from the heat of the sun. And, although in many cases you can add an electric or gas motor for lake use or long, slow stretches on the river...you probably must now register the boat with the state and deal with batteries, gas etc.

Although these boats can be disassembled and deflated, most folks avoid the annoyance of doing so and transport them on utility trailers, or on their car top (if not too large and heavy). Smaller, personal size pontoon boats can be picked up or walked to the water. Larger, two and three person models will require launching from a trailer and winching back aboard the trailer after the float.

**This is some basic information to aid in making a decision when considering a boat. There are plenty of excellent publications, on-line resources, and clinics to help you learn more; but especially to learn proper paddling and rowing skills, safety advice and rescue techniques.**