



The seam between the hull and the deck is outstanding

The Chinese are coming I

Kajakk.net has launched a new kayak brand on the Norwegian market this spring. After testing the Seabird Designs Expedition we can see that the Chinese means business.

Text Jan Fjelde - Photo Atle Tveit

This is a sea kayak on it's best, or a long-voyage kayak, as some Swedes prefer to call it. The boat appears big and voluminous though the essential measures isolated don't tell much about this. It's constructed to load between 150 and 160 kilos on a long trip, and this indicates that it's a lot of volume here.

The designers behind the Seabird Expedition have managed to make the boat appear both elegant and slim despite of the size.

Elegantly executed
In order to achieve a tighter response between the paddle and the water, the deck swings in from the cockpit and forward. This is elegantly integrated in the kayaks lines. It's equipped with a somewhat small hatch of rubber in the front and a big oval hatch of the same material on the stern deck. The bow is generously rigged with good elastic lines. In the back it's somewhat sparingly

use of straps and fixing devices. The kayak is equipped with ice-rudder of high quality. This can turn 270 degrees and then be fastened to the stern. The deck on this kayak is made out of fiberglass with yellow gel coat while the hull is in Kevlar with clear epoxy furthest out. The work is truly delicately executed.

Good finish
The hatch is of average size. The seat



1. All hatches are secured with safety line.
2. The rudders resistance can be adjusted with a big screw in the front edge of the rudder arrangement.
3. The seat is molded in fiberglass, and can be adjusted up to three steps in the longitudinal direction.

It's obvious that this boat aims high. The quality gets top scores.

is molded in fiberglass, and can be adjusted up to three steps in the longitudinal direction. The back rest is adjustable and can be removed easily if wanted. The back rest is placed low, so it's easy to lain back under the Eskimo roll. The steering pedals glides on rails along the hull side. These can easily be adjusted in so many positions that anyone should be able to fit in here. The seam between the hull and the deck is impressing and is one of the most sophisticated on the market. The mold work on the hull and the deck is also first class. The boats are vacuum molded and is made in sandwich technology with a honeycomb core. The finish is outstanding on the inside as well as on the outside.

Safety
Finally someone has noticed that the Swedish VKV is smarter than most people. Some years ago they sat up a pipe crosswise behind the cockpit making it possible to put up float bags on both sides. Seabird took the liberty to set up a pipe with the same inner diameter as VKV, and putted it up crosswise behind the beam. This is without a doubt the safest way to re-enter safely after a capsze. If you are just a common man/ woman or kayak) you can forget about the Eskimo roll if you capsze under difficult conditions. The roll is only for specialists when the weather gets ugly. Period. I applaud Seabird for giving priority to safety. Other manufactures will probably come around gradually. This is a typical sea kayak with two tight bulkheads, so the amount of water in the cockpit after a capsze is near to nothing.

Stability and speed
Seabird Designs Expedition has very high primary and secondary stability. It feels safe, stable and solid. The kayak behaves exemplary without ballast, but if you put on a little weight in the front, the tuning gets just perfect and the stability increases even further. Fully loaded this Expedition must appear as a floating raft in terms of stability. It's no doubt that this kayak fits even for inexperienced paddlers.
On flat water the speed was measured to 7, 94 miles per hour. What's more interesting in this case, is the average speed that was achieved in our test track. The boat managed to reach 5, 18 mile per hour with energy that could last for far above an hour. In test executed by the writer the same paddle was used the whole time, the VKV-wing adjusted to 220 cm length and a blade angle on 68 degrees.

Sea capacity
I feel that sea kayaks should be tested both on flat water and in hard weather. On one of the test days the wind reached 12-15 meters per second. In bad weather I prefer a classic paddle. This day I had a Lendal Kinetik Tour S, 225 cm in length. The speed against the wind was in periods down to 1,84 miles per hour, while it on surf went up to very satisfying 10, 47 miles per hour! The boat behaved unusually safe and I never felt insecure. Both sidelong and straight against the wind, this kayak stands against a lot of sea. Without ballast it rattles a little when the waves get narrow. With a little weight in the fore bulkhead this tendency is reduced.



Measurements and prices

| | |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Length | 530 cm |
| Width | 59 cm |
| Cockpit opening | 83x43 cm |
| Weight of the tested boat | 22 kilo |

The tested version with Kevlar hull and fiberglass deck with a sandwich technology honeycomb core: kr. 11 500,-
Hull and deck in fiberglass with sandwich technology honeycomb core: kr. 8.900,-
Special lightweight edition of entirely black carbon and honeycomb: kr. 19.600,-

Distributor:
Kajakk.net, www.kajakk.net

Remember that sea kayaks almost without exceptions are constructed to carry some cargo. When paddling with the wind the boat is fast and surfs willingly, but active use of the rudder is essential. The response of the rudder is both precise and good, but you must be alert all the time under these conditions. Things happens very fast when the nature shows its powers. Seabird Expedition is very seaworthy -

The Chinese are coming

Seabird Expedition

The Seabird Expedition is full of clever solutions. On each side of the cockpit you will find elastic bands, with these you can fasten the paddles alongside the hull while standing still.



The Seabird Expedition looks elegant and slim despite its size.

though you can find kayaks that move more graceful in bad weather. Those are on the other hand less stable, so you'll always have to compromise.

extra hatch right behind the beam for small matters. You will also find a fitting for a fishing rod or a mast on the stern deck. All the hatches are secured with safety lines. The carrying handles are comfortable to hold on to and appear to be very solid. All over this kayak seems to be well thought trough.

Conclusion

Seabird Designs Expedition (Made in China) holds high quality that it can be compared with any other kayak. Many other boats aren't half as well constructed as this. It's obvious that this boat aims high. The quality gets top scores. This is quite simply a sensation! This combination between price,

quality and good design is at the moment unbeatable. I am convinced that this statement is true, but if any of the readers (or other importers for that matter) believes that they will find a better boat in the same price class, send me an e-mail. I would like to have that boat presented and tested.

Details

The boat is full of cleaver solutions. On each side of the cockpit you will find elastic bands, with these you can fasten the paddles alongside the hull while standing still. All the deck lines are lowered. The resistance of the rudder can be adjusted with a big screw in front of it. We discover an



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The Chinese are coming II

Sea Bird H2O as a more aggressive design than its other family member, but still looks good.

TEKST JAN FJELDE
FOTO ATLE TVEIT

This dainty boat called H2O comes from the same Chinese factory, Seabird Designs. The lines on the H2O is quite different from its sister Expedition. The kayak looks sassier and is both longer and slimmer than the voluminous Expedition. Sea Bird H2O as a more aggressive design than its other family member, but still looks good.

The front deck is somewhat higher than the stern deck, while the bow is steep and sharp. The front deck is curved more lengthwise and the hatch on this is double. Over the rubber hatch you'll find a protecting shield which is fastened with two adjustable straps. This solution makes the hatch completely watertight and can take quite a lot, that's why there are several boats on the market with similar concept. In addition I myself find it quite stylish. We notice that several manufactures produce some models (for instance Current Designs Stratus, Epic 18 and QCC Q700) with similar design elements.

Two in one

This boat can be delivered with different types of cockpit layout. If you want rudder pedals and a tiller steering system a la racers, you've got it. If you want racing seats, this can be delivered as well. The basic edition is equipped with longitudinal rails with steering pedals and a standard touring seat with a high and comfortable back rest. This can however be easily removed with a hand grip if you wish to paddle without it. The thing most genius about this kayak is however that it can be used both as a training boat and a sea kayak. Without ballast and the back rest it feels like a training racer. It's easy to maneuver and willingly, obviously it's aiming for the marathon segment. It takes a moderate strength to hold a little over 4, 6 miles per hour over a longer period, as long as the paddler has the right technique and good condition. Loaded for a long tour and with the back rest in its place, the only thing left to do is to put away from the shore.

Unrivalled finish

This kayak has the exactly same finish as the Expedition since it is built by the same people and in the same premises. The hull and deck is made out of fiberglass. The hull can be delivered in Kevlar if wanted. Regardless of which model you prefer, all the boats are built with sandwich technology with a honeycomb core. This makes the kayaks very solid and stiff, this however doesn't influence the weight by much. The tested boat has a white hull with a fantastic deep red deck, which



1. Stylish hatch cover with rubber inner part. 2. H2O can be delivered with different seat solutions with and without removable back rest. Notice the hole in the hull side – here is the possibility for self rescuing with the help of floating bags. 3. The rudder arrangement function as it shall. 4. H2O can be delivered with longitudinal rails with steering pedals as here, or with tiller steering system.

would make even a Ferrari go green with jealousy. All the fittings for the deck lines are immersed in the hull and the rigging itself is quite similar to the other boat. Behind it has rudder and hatch like its sister Expedition.

Safety and steadiness

As mentioned this two boats are built on parallel assembly lines, so the safety concepts are also identical. I especially referring to the self rescue equipment with the help of float bags on each side. H2O has the same crosswise pipe behind the beam. As most of the sea kayaks there is watertight bulkhead both in the front and in the back. The similarities between Expedition and H2O stop when it comes to steadiness. H2O don't feel half as safe and steady. This is definitely a boat for experienced paddlers, especially the one we got for the test. The seat is placed quite high in order to get a steep angle on the paddle when it enters the water. This is something those who are experienced wing paddles will appreciate, at the same time as it can scare the rookies. The manufacturer has informed that the seat on future boats will either be assembled two cm lower or possibly be adjustable in the height.

Speed

The speed were tested by GPS trough our track. The average speed came out at 4,6 knots, which is just 0,1 faster than the Expedition. Within an hour get you 185 meter lead. The top speed stops at 6,6 knots, which is 0,3 less than the other. With 10 kilos ballast in the fore bulkhead increased the top speed to whole 7 knots.

The explanation is simple since the boat is built to be paddled fast even heavily loaded. It's important to notice that H2O needs more weight in the front than back. Without load the bow starts to rise strongly at approximately 6 knots. When training with empty boat on flat water, the phenomenon isn't noticeable at 5 knots.

Sea capacity

H2O is great as a training boat on flat water. Unloaded it gives you the right tourracer-feeling. When the air is calm it never gets boring. The so called autonomous neural network (the neurons that aren't under the influence of the conscious mind) has to work continuous. Other sea kayaks can seem somewhat uninspired for those with some experience. Therefore there are few who use this kind of boats only for training purpose. In H2O you can train as much as you can manage. A sea kayak should be tested under realistic conditions, thus why I had to take this one out on the fjord.

Blunder

On the last test day it snowed and blew 11-12 m/s. Gradually as the waves got bigger and bigger and the wind more powerful I understood that this wasn't a good idea. With a wing paddle, high seat and not a gram of ballast this could have ended in an involuntary bath. I usually don't get scared of a strong breeze, but this was a little too much for an empty Seabird H2O in such waves. This kayak is now delivered with a lower seat. It's probably all it takes for this boat to be experienced as good in bad

weather. Sometimes it's just a few cm that stand between success and failure. Just remember that this hull needs ballast in bad weather.

Conclusion

The constructor quality on this boat is great and it's very strong. Everything functions as it shall. The rudder is excellent and the hatches 100% watertight. The joint between the hull and the deck is impressive as on the other boat. Absolutely nothing gives away that this was built in China. Concerning the construction quality this continent has now raised to a higher level. H2O is a two in one product. For those who are planning on mainly using it for training and marathon paddling. It can be delivered with racing seats without a back rest and great rudder pedals and tiller steering system. If you're also planning on using it in tougher waters we recommend a standard seat (that is lower) and steering pedals on longitudinal rails. You'll also need a little ballast to get the best out of the boat. The kayak is a little more demanding than an average sea kayak. When it comes to price, this is a real scoop.

Measurements and prices

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Length | 540 cm |
| Width | 54 cm |
| Cockpit opening | 83x43 cm |
| Weight | 21,5 kg |

The tested version in fiberglass and epoxy with sandwich technology honeycomb core: kr. 8.900,-
Fiberglass and epoxy with Kevlar hull and sandwich technology honeycomb core: kr. 11.500,-
Full carbon lightweight version with honeycomb core: kr. 19.600,-

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