

TIDERACE XCITE



LONG TERM REVIEW

The boat is a 2008 model Xcite in 'Hardcore' construction, a vacuum bag, vinylester resin layup. It is a composite hybrid of fibreglass with multiple layers of hybrid cloth (a woven cloth incorporating carbon 3k, aramid, glass and diolen) to hull and deck, spheretex core reinforcement and a carbon unidirectional 30 cm wide internal keel strip. Since construction of Tiderace boats was moved to Finland for 2009, developments have been introduced in design and construction.

The Hardcore construction is very strong and stiff. There is virtually no flex in either deck or hull; the whole boat feels very strong and well made. The finish on my boat is immaculate and is proving very hard wearing. The strength of the deck and hull is noticeably greater than other boats, even when strapping to a car roof carrier.

The cockpit is simply the most comfortable and ergonomic I've used. The seat pan is glass and is adjustable fore and aft. It sits very low in the boat and has a foam shim to protect the inner hull. The back band originally fitted was comfortable, but had a tendency to fold under when entering the boat. Tiderace have since developed an improved back band which is a modern variation of a simple back strap. It has lots of adjustment and provides unobtrusive support. The improved version has been retro-fitted to my boat and (for me) is better.

The 2008 Tiderace boats came with an angled footplate which I find very comfortable and positive. It is adjustable fore and aft and has a cutaway at the

lower edge to permit legs to be stretched. A thoughtful touch is that the nuts used to adjust both seat and footplate are rounded rather than a thumbwheel, so that the nuts don't catch legs and ankles. On newer boats, the footplate has been replaced by a SmartTrack footpeg arrangement, which has the benefits of the footplate (natural angle, etc.) with additional strength and consistency of foot position for smaller paddlers.

The thigh braces are quite aggressive, but the design of the cockpit with a knees-up paddling position allows the paddler to either lock in to the braces or have plenty of space for the thighs by adjusting foot position on the footplate. The cockpit is easy to enter and exit, and though I've found that wet exits are more conveniently done one leg at a time due to the pronounced keyhole shape and thigh brace angle, this does not feel restrictive in any way.

Four hatches are fitted. The fore and aft hatches are 24 cm round with rubber Kajaksport covers. The day hatch is a 20 cm round hatch with a plastic centred cover. A 15 cm round deck pocket hatch sits just forward of the cockpit. All are securely tethered, and none of the hatches have leaked. The usefulness of the deck pocket hatch is out of all proportion to its size!

The deck fittings are recessed and glassed over on the inside; they've proved strong and haven't leaked. The deck elastic arrangement is well thought out and includes a loop with a plastic clamp on both fore and aft decks to retain paddle shafts.

A wire skeg is fitted with the wire centrally located in the blade. The blade itself is quite small but very effective. It's been reliable and kink-free so far.

The coloured hull does show scratches more than a white hull; a white hull is now available.

Production of Tiderace boats was moved from Poland to Finland following some issues with quality control. I can honestly say that I'm mightily impressed with the quality and finish of the particular boat I own. A minor leak from the skeg box was fixed promptly and effectively by Tiderace/Knoydart – customer service has been excellent.

PERFORMANCE

This boat is very comfortable. It has been paddled by others in a wide range of sizes and all have been able to get a good, comfortable fit. Initial stability is very good, and the boat feels immediately reassuring for novice paddlers.

The rockered hull gives great turning response and, when coupled with the sitting position and positive leg and hip contact, makes for a fantastically manoeuvrable boat. It is predictable and stable on edge, even when on a fairly radical (for me) edge.

Touring speed is very acceptable. It isn't an expedition greyhound (the Xplore fits that role), but covers the ground with ease. Coming from a mountaineering and hillwalking background and being accustomed to packing kit into a 65 litre sack, I find that I can fit everything

SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH: 525 cm, WIDTH: 53 cm, DEPTH: 31 cm, COCKPIT: 87 X 49 cm, RRP: CLASSIC £2195 / HARD-CORE £2395
THE XCITE IS SUITED FOR PADDLERS RANGING BETWEEN 5' 5" AND 6' 2" AND WEIGHING UP TO 16 STONE
THE XCITE CAN ACCOMMODATE LARGE FEET
THE XCITE MAY BE USED AS A "DAY BOAT" BY TALLER / HEAVIER PADDLERS

needed for several days into the hatches with ease. The round hatches mean that the tent poles need to be packed separately, but that's the only compromise I've found.

The cockpit design and the position of the deck pocket hatch would put a map too far away for comfortable reading if stowed on the foredeck, so a spraydeck with map elastics is useful.

The very low back deck makes laying back comfortable; indeed, one of the noticeable features of the boat is how svelte it appears just behind the cockpit. The low back deck and raised foredeck don't create excessive windage, and the fitted skeg is useful in moderate to strong crosswinds. The design carries a fair bit of volume forward, but the ride is dry and free from excessive slamming.

I've hit the boat pretty hard on a few occasions while rock hopping, both end-on and under the hull. It has simply shrugged off what I suspect may have damaged some other boats.

In rough conditions, the Xcite comes alive. The design brief was for a rough-water-capable boat, and this has carried through. The boat feels as if it can take anything, and remains predictable and reassuring in all the conditions in which I've paddled it. In a following sea, the boat just loves to surf. It accelerates quickly and holds waves with ease. The hull design just seems to fit the short standing waves we experience at the mouths of Scottish sea lochs and the volume forward prevents the nose burying. I have always felt that this is a

boat that will look after me if I don't do anything too stupid!

SUMMARY

During the time I've owned the Xcite I've got to know the boat pretty well. I have to say that I love paddling it. It does everything I want to do with consummate ease, is hugely comfortable, well-finished and bullet tough. My interest is in the interface between the land and the sea i.e. in exploring the coast and its features rather than in extended crossings. The Xcite is an ideal boat for this. It's nimble and stable enough to stop and take in the view or take photographs even in quite choppy conditions. Aled Williams' designs are quite rightly well-regarded, and this is no exception. It is, for me anyway, the complete boat.

MANUFACTURER'S COMMENT XCITE LONG TERM REVIEW

We wish to thank the author for his kind comments about the Xcite. At Tiderace, we strive to build boats that both we and our customers enjoy paddling. The Xcite is the product of many years of development in pursuit of building the ultimate 'advanced boat'. We define an Advanced Boat as one which does not intrude into paddling performance: a boat which turns when you want to turn, accelerates when you want to go faster, remains stable and composed on the water when things get a little scary and surfs a wave just as you imagined. The author has obviously gained empathy with the Xcite and it makes us proud to see our products performing in the way we intended.

The Xcite and Xplore have undergone many developments since the reviewed '08 model. These improvements include the following.

Deck redesign: the hatch recess profiles have been changed to make the deck stiffer and accommodate a new manufacturing technique. A compass recess has been added, cockpit rim and thigh braces have been updated and the overall deck profile makes for a more rigid shape.

Cockpit and sitting position: the footplate has been replaced with SmartTrack footrests. The footplate's lack of versatility and its loose fit for smaller paddlers rendered it obsolete. The original concept was to connect the seat and footrest in a way which did not stress the kayak's structure – this has been revised so that all cockpit components share and dissipate the loads through the whole structure. The seat is now firmly fixed with the paddler's centre of gravity directly over the hull's centre of buoyancy.

These numerous small changes and adjustments are part of the continuing process of refining the Tiderace cockpit system to give paddlers the most comfortable paddling position and best interface with which to control the kayak. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Height 1.75m, weight 74kgs

Experience: I've owned a Tiderace Xcite for 18 months, and during that period have paddled over 1000 km in conditions varying from flat calm to F6. I paddle around the coastline of Scotland, in both summer and winter.