

TIDERACE SEA KAYAKS PUT THROUGH THEIR PACES

OBSERVATIONS FROM AN EXTREME EXPEDITION AND OPEN-WATER CROSSING RECORD HOLDER, PATRICK WINTERTON AND OTHERS ON THE TIDERACE RANGE OF SEA KAYAKS.

TIDERACE XPLORE



LONG TERM REVIEW 1

The Xplore was my chosen boat for attempting one of the most committing sea kayaking challenges in the British Isles, a 2500 km trip culminating in a three day open-water crossing from the Hebrides to the Faroe Islands. I have now done over 3500 km in this boat and have paddled it in all conditions. It is the best constructed boat I have ever paddled and has survived a number of thumping collisions, careless rock-hopping sessions and numerous emergency landings. Spend time fitting it to your body and getting the correct seat placement and it will feel wonderfully responsive and efficient.

The Xplore is a full-sized expedition sea kayak. This carrying capacity was pushed to the limit during the first Faroes crossing attempt when carrying an 80 kg paddler and another 80 kg of expedition kit (including a full complement of film recording equipment). Overloading of this nature has a limiting effect on boat handling and makes for a wet ride; be more reasonable and these problems are ironed out. For typical expedition use, there's easy access into ample storage space. I drilled 1 mm holes in each of the bulkheads to equalise

pressure and had dry kit for 7 weeks. With the new, more flexible, Kajaksport hatch covers (as on the Xplore_X) there is no need to drill holes. The awkward centrally located day hatch has now been offset which improves access when on the water (this requirement is anyway infrequent as there is also a small deck hatch in front of the cockpit). Combine that with a small deck bag, and possibly some spare clothing under your knees, and there is more than enough storage space to keep everything you need for a long day at sea accessible.

The cockpit is snug and allows good body/boat contact, therefore giving good kayak control. During long crossings I enjoy paddling with my knees together, K1 style. I reduced the size of the thigh grips to allow for this, but do not recommend it as a mainstream modification however as it reduces contact with the boat. The old-style footrest was a big slanted footplate, quick to adjust when out of the boat. This took as much leg pressure as I could apply, but limited the number of positions that my feet could effectively adopt. I believe this has already been changed and improved.

Carrying handles and deck lines are strong, well placed and durable. The fine ends

of the bow and stern make the boat easy to grasp when carrying fully laden and without using the handles.

With the substantial load that I carried, some initial tracking issues were resolved by fitting a larger skeg which allowed the boat to sit firm on my chosen bearing in any wind aspect. The Xplore has been designed for speed and doesn't disappoint. Laden, it averaged four knots during calm weather days and is considerably faster when trying to outrun a thunder storm. The combination of a fine bow and an excessively heavy load reduced the boat speed when paddling into the weather. (I should say that I have only ever tested my speed against my Faroes partner Mick Berwick, who makes most people look and feel sluggish.)

The Xplore has a long waterline length, yet it responds well to edging. Despite its sleek design, it is stable enough to allow for good photography and for easy re-entry. The centre of buoyancy is slightly further forward than most kayaks; this facilitates wave-catching but increases the turning forces once you are off-line. Paddling it certainly sharpens up both reactions and skill levels.

SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH: 549 cm, WIDTH: 53 cm, DEPTH: 33.5 cm, COCKPIT: 87 X 49 cm, RRP: CLASSIC £2250 / HARD-CORE £2450
THE XPLORE IS SUITED TO PADDLERS RANGING BETWEEN 5' 6" AND 6' 3" AND WEIGHING UP TO 17 STONE
THE XPLORE CAN ACCOMMODATE LARGE FEET

I had a love-hate relationship with this boat during the initial part of the expedition leading up to the record attempt. In retrospect, even the large volume of the Xplore proved too small for my extreme challenge. All in all, the Xplore is an outstanding expedition boat that is fast enough to ensure you always get first choice of campsite.

LONG TERM REVIEW 2

I have been paddling my Tiderace Xplore, Hardcore version, for one and a half years now. I am very pleased with it; it suits my type of kayaking very well.

The cockpit is very comfortable. The deck is tall enough for me to move my feet around while wearing boots over my drysuit. I have found that the boat handles best with the seat in the rearmost position. As an added benefit, this makes entries and exits, both dry and wet, quite easy even with my long legs. I prefer the footplate in the early production Tideraces (later boats have pegs). The plate offers support in all positions, and there is no risk of slipping a foot off a peg. The downside is that some storage room is lost between plate and bulkhead and it is not possible to fit a foot pump.

My Xplore is doing a very good job as an all-round boat. Most of my paddling is day trips, with no other ballast than my lunch. When empty it tends to weathercock more than other kayaks I have paddled, but not more than the skeg can handle. Thanks to the design it handles and turns like a smaller boat, and responds very well to edging. When edging, there is a distinct point when it tells me not to proceed if I prefer to keep my hair dry. It becomes very stable when filled up with camping gear, while still handling excellently. Despite the low rear deck, it took all the supplies and gear for a week-long trip around the Arctic Circle/Northern Norway where we encountered all kinds of conditions. The laden Xplore took it all in its stride.

The finish and workmanship seem generally very good, and the kayak has held up well to quite intensive use. There is no gelcoat chipping; in fact, the gelcoat seems harder and scratches less easily than my previous boats. The fact that the kayak looks great on the water is another positive feature!

There are only minor details regarding the Xplore. I quickly replaced the hard plastic Kajaksport backrest with a backstrap, as

the backrest had a nasty tendency to pinch the skin on my bum between backrest and seat – ouch! The bulkheads had no breathing holes, so I once worriedly watched the front hatch cave in after launching a warm kayak on cold water. What made things worse was that the front and rear hatches were not secured to the kayak and would sink if lost. They have inside eyelets, but there were no anchor points inside the hull. I made my own and attached a line. I recently found a small but annoying leak at the cockpit rim, which was easily fixed with Sikaflex. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR – LONG TERM REVIEW 2

Height: 188 cm

Weight: 80 kg

Shoe size: 11 / 13 w/drysuit.

Experience: I began sea kayaking in 1983, but later converted to open canoeing for years due to family situation. Returned to sea kayaking six years ago. Trips vary from day-long paddles to week-long expeditions, mostly in sheltered water (fjords or archipelagos). Have recently qualified as club instructor for introductory/beginner level.