

## Learning to Ski

An introduction to the Epic V10 Sport

By Mark Sundin



Just before Xmas I had a go on a couple of the new Epic racing ski's, the V12 & V10 Sport. Thinking they would be crazy unstable & made for super-fit surf lifesaving athletes I was a bit tentative pushing off the bank at Currumbin Creek & wobbled along on the first few paddle strokes, especially in the real performance boat, the V12.

As I built up a head of steam, I realised that they're not as unstable as I'd been led to believe, and that the V10 Sport was actually on par with many sea kayaks for the level of stability. So, as you do, I got hold of one for myself & have spent the last 3 weeks throwing myself into ski paddling on the V10 Sport to see if I can get a small taste of the sort of action you see in the fantastic ski races around Sydney in summer (for a look at a few local races check out Rambo's Locker).

I began with a couple of gentle paddles in Botany Bay, getting a feel for the extremely close catch zone on a ski compared to a sea kayak. I quickly realised that once you get any sort of following conditions, the ski grows another gear & you find yourself scooting along at 13kmh+ in even a moderate bay chop. The stability hardens up considerably once you're up over 9kmh, which is achievable on dead flat water at even a moderate cruise pace.

In comparison to a sea kayak like my Aquanaut, the initial stability is a little bit twitchier, but the secondary is comparable, even if it is a 'different' type of secondary stability. In my experience & opinion, a sea kayaker with a decent stroke & a moderate level of fitness would make the transition to a V10 Sport without any problems. I wouldn't make the same recommendation about the V12; they are clearly more demanding boats to paddle on the sea & require a much higher base skill level.



I then took the ski with me to Noosa on our family Xmas holiday, and spent the week going for hour or so long blasts up the river, out through the Noosa Bar & into Laguna Bay. I had a couple of swims on the bar when hit by breaking waves, but quickly & easily remounted to keep on going, even in the surf zone. I'd then head out into the bay upwind, and across the wind to get a feel for the stability & feel of the hull in moderate 15kn winds & little 1m wind waves. I'd finish up with a downwind flyer on the back of the Nor'easter's that dominated the week, and surf back across the bar riding the swell & surf through the break zone & into the calm of the river again. Once in the river, I'd ride the bow waves of the tinnies & sightseeing boats heading back upriver, cruising along on their wakes at 6-8 knots. As exhilarating as the open ocean & surf zone stuff was, riding bow waves is pretty cool – kind of like being towed along by an invisible line. It's certainly not something I've ever been able to do in a sea kayak!

On arriving back in Sydney, a decent Nor'easter kicked up in Sydney in the first week of January, and I went out with a mate off Malabar to head upwind past Magic Point. The location was deliberate, there is a big water instructing play spot known for rebound & steep swell due to the sub-ocean topography & close proximity of the Maroubra cliffs. In considerable bump, rebound & 2-2.5m steep wind & swell waves coming from a couple of directions at once, the ski was rock solid, very reassuring & ploughed on through the mess with aplomb.

Turning around about 3km off Malabar, the steep following swell was pretty intimidating and I didn't have the bottle to really lean forward & race down the face of the waves. So, backing off a bit on the bigger ones, I gradually got the feel for the tracking of the ski & realised that the rudder position – a good metre forward of the stern – keeps the boat tracking even when the following seas steepen up appreciably. In any ruddered sea kayak, the rudder would have been swinging in the breeze on the wave crests & making me skate around all over the place. After a few minutes of getting a feel for this rather counter intuitive tracking (that is, no sign of a sea kayak-like broach) I began to loosen up & go a bit harder at the following waves. That's the point when the real fun began. When I occasionally got the timing right, the boat speed down-sea was almost frightening. Oscar Chalupsky, the charismatic co-founder of Epic & multiple world ski champion, told me in a long chat at our warehouse before Xmas that he regularly has his boats charging at 25kmh+ on following seas in South Africa, & I can believe it. You go so fast that the schoolboy fear of skateboard speed wobbles come flooding back, that part terror, part exhilaration when you feel as though one false move will bring you crashing down. Not that I'm anything but a dead-set novice, but the trick to it on a surf ski is to relax & enjoy the ride, then make use of the speed you've picked up on the run to latch onto the next one & so on. I can honestly say that the moments when I got it right rate among the most thrilling bits of paddling I've done on the ocean since I first began paddling sea kayaks on the sea nearly a decade ago. 'OK' you're saying, 'but what will the ski do for me, I'm a sea kayaker'. Personally, I love

memories in sport were battling against test bowlers like Malcolm Marshall and Glen McGrath, or

bowling to guys like Michael Bevan or Michael Slater at club level. While I love my sea kayak & learn something new just about every time I go out, the idea of trying something that I'm nowhere near as proficient at, while still being a paddle sport is exhilarating. Another aim for 2010 is to have a proper crack at white water paddling, but I think I'll have to clone myself to make that little fantasy come true....

So, as to the reasons why, I've narrowed that down to three big things that I'm hoping to get out of it, besides the overall challenge. First, the fantastic high knee position ergonomics of the seat allows to you rotate fully in your forward stroke. In the ski I exit my stroke & rotate all the way around to the next catch using all of the power my torso & legs can provide, where in my sea kayaks this is limited by the deck on the boat restricting my leg drive. It will eventually make me a much faster & stronger paddler. Second, although the V10 Sport is very stable, the ski requires a little more than sea kayak-style remote control balance, so I have to use my core strength if I want to wring everything out of it. Finally, the potential for a really high, resistance-free cadence helps me to build my paddle speed, acceleration & my paddling 'under duress'. In my sporting career, practice under stress made for perfect execution under pressure when you needed it, and the ski offers plenty of high octane concentration, reflex training & pure speed. You want to make an hour turn into a few minutes? Take a ski out on a decent following sea & watch the time go past in a flash...!

Add to that the ability to pull a 15kg boat off the roof, throw it on your shoulders with just a pfd & a pair of cossies & head out for an hours fitness cruising & it is a high-reward, low maintenance addition to your paddling quiver.



Like all of the things we like & believe in, we will be selling the V10 Sport from early February. The boat we think is best suited to our sea kayaking devotees looking to make the transition to a surf ski is the V10 Sport, in the Club layup, which is the 'heaviest' of the Epic layups at 15kg, but runs out at a very affordable \$2750.

If you're interested in trying one out, we offer an ocean test paddle, sitting alongside in a sea kayak with full safety gear etc, and advice on how best to get the most out of the boat. You won't go away from one of our demo paddles with any doubts as to whether these ski's are for you, and the novice blues will be allayed with an informed instructional first paddle.

Not all sea kayakers will get a kick out of the V10 Sport, but if my experience is anything to go by, there will be few out there who will find this rising phenomena every bit as enjoyable as our noble & ancient sport. I am learning that every single paddling discipline has technical lessons for sea kayakers, and ski paddling is one of the great ways to fast track performance skills in a kayak, no question.

Keep an eye on our website for details of when our stock arrives.