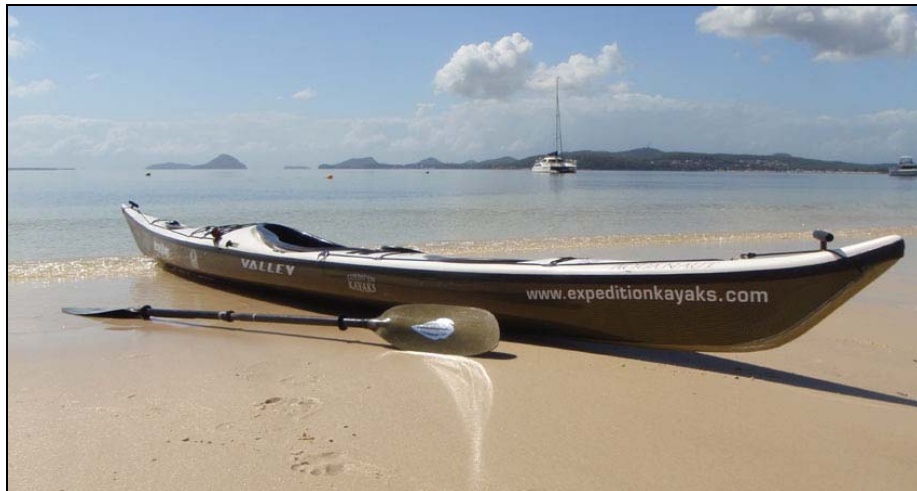


EK

VALLEY
THE ORIGINAL BRITISH SEA KAYAK

The Valley Aquanaut

By Mark Sundin



My Aquanaut, Nelson Bay, NSW

It's just over a year since I took delivery of my shiny Valley Carbon Kevlar Aquanaut, and I thought it an opportune time to reflect on the boat & what my impressions are now that I know it so well. The first thing that strikes you about the Aquanaut is the reassuring stability when things get rough. I find myself reaching for the camera to take a shot of someone engaging in the rebound or swells around Sydney while my paddling partners have their hands firmly glued to the paddle. No question, the predictable secondary stability of the boat provides a superb platform.



Playing in a rock garden around Malabar, Sydney (photo Rob Mercer).

Of course, a stable boat is often hard work to edge turn or maneuver, but the designers of the Aquanaut have overcome this with a medium rounded chine which allows you to drop off the keel line with a small edge or lean. The ease of hip control isn't as pronounced as it is on a Nordkapp, where you can really control your boat with the tiniest of movements once you get the hang of it, but you definitely don't need to be overly strong to steer the boat with your core.

As far as speed goes, on dead flat water I reckon it hits the wall at about 8.6kmh, based on a series of timed flat water paddles where the aim was to go fast. On the sea however, where the power of a wave releases the planning section of the hull, I've cruised the 22km Sydney coastline in just under 2 hours.



Riding a Force 8 gale (photo Rob Mercer).

This is due to the fantastic surf-ability of the Aquanaut. I'm yet to paddle a sea kayak that latches onto the power of a following wave, or glides better down the back end of an oncoming swell than my Aquanaut. In beach or bar-break surf, this boat is sitting on the royal podium with maybe only the Avocet (which I can't fit into) and the North Shore Atlantic superior. The great surfing characteristics of the Atlantic & Avocet however are at the cost of a little boat speed, so there are always swings & roundabouts. Unless the surf has been big, it's almost impossible to get the bow to dig in & endo, which most people would regard as a quality to be cast in platinum. I personally quite enjoy a good endo when I've planned it...!



Cruising the cliffs of Sydney (photo Rob Mercer).

Where I'm lacking any real experience is in packing & paddling the boat for an extended trip, however Brian Towell came back full of praise for the boat after paddling his Aquanaut across Bass Strait in February. Rob Mercer took his Aquanaut on a 150km paddle in November last year & commented on the loss of real sportiness in the boat when packed, but that with care in weight distribution the trim of the boat could be adjusted to make the most of the day's conditions.



Looking pretty on the beach, Watson's Bay, NSW.

Not every boat can do everything, & I can safely say if I was heading off for a month I'd be in a Nordkapp, rather than my trusty Aquanaut, for the extra waterline length & carrying capacity. My paddling is confined for now to day & overnight trips, short blasts in the surf or around the caves & cliffs of Sydney, and the Aquanaut is a boat I am well & truly smitten with, for it's ability to provide a superb platform & feedback in the water in which I like to paddle. I've paddled other designs which are faster on dead flat water, others which can carry more gear or are 'easier' to paddle, but none which react so beautifully to the motion of the sea.

Mark Sundin
Expedition Kayaks
mark@expeditionkayaks.com